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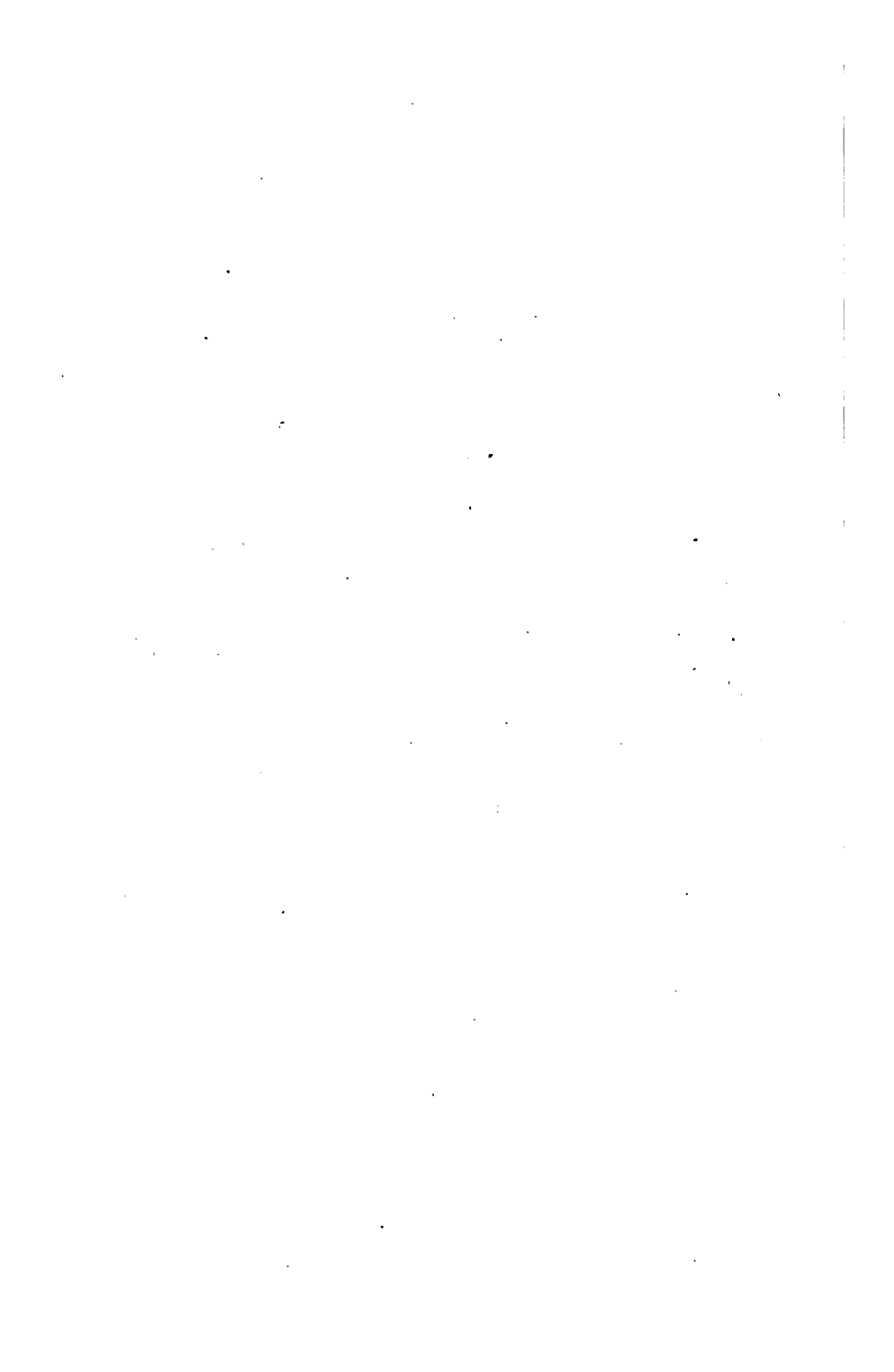
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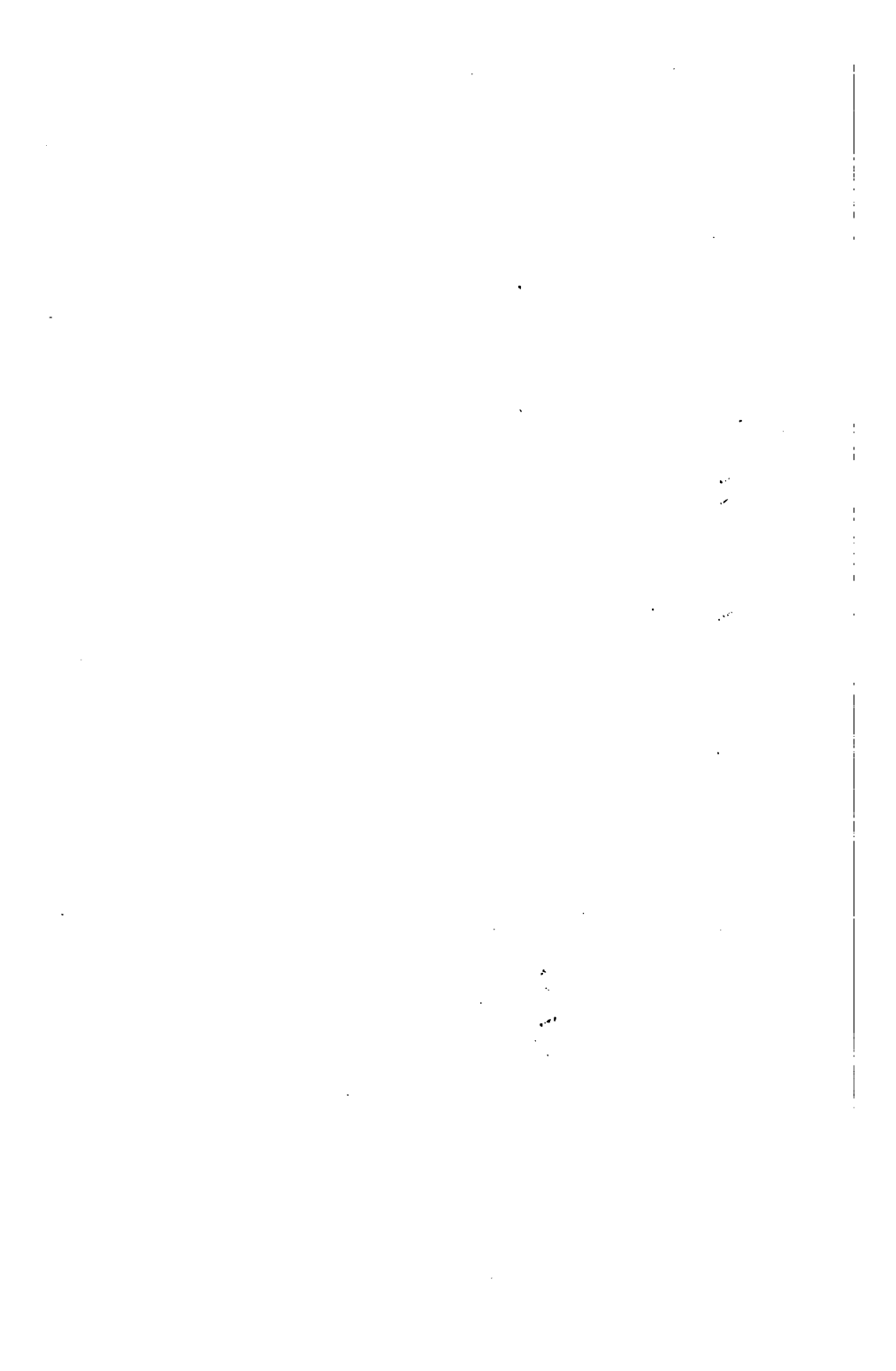
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MARTHA.

VOL. I.



MARTHA.

BY

WILLIAM GILBERT,

AUTHOR OF

“LUCREZIA BORGIA,” “SHIRLEY HALL ASYLUM,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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MARTHA.

CHAPTER I.

THE GENERAL SHOP.

ABOUT three miles from the Cathedral city of
X— stands the Claydon turnpike gate,
round which are clustered a number of cottages
almost sufficiently numerous to merit the name
of village. The most conspicuous of these,
after the little roadside inn, is the dwelling of
Mr. Thomas Carter, the proprietor of a highly
respectable general shop. Mr. Carter was a
married man, and his wife—a tall, honest, shrewd
woman, about forty years of age—was a person
of very industrious and cleanly habits, but some-
what infirm of temper. In the shop Mr. Carter
employed an errand boy named Giles—a big,
raw-boned, lazy fellow about sixteen years of

age; and Mrs. Carter had under her special command a little girl about fourteen years of age, parents unknown, who had been obtained from the union workhouse. It was this damsel's duty to assist in making the beds and to take charge of the kitchen fire, when her mistress, in consequence of the master's absence from home, stress of customers, or other causes, was occupied in the shop.

Mr. Carter himself was an active, bustling man of business, about fifty years of age. Although the amount of capital he employed was far from being large, the articles he dealt in were very numerous. As an ill-painted board over the shop-door indicated, he was licensed to deal in tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff. Besides these, he sold Bath bricks, lucifers, treacle, soap, small beer, and candles. Butter and bacon were also to be found in his shop in considerable quantities. To these were added pins, needles, balls of cotton all the colours of the rainbow, barley-sugar, spices, and a hundred other things too various to describe. Besides the onerous duties of general shop-keeper, he was also postmaster of the district, as might be seen by a letter-

box inserted in an opaque pane in the shop window. He was much respected by his customers, and with reason, for although there was no other shop near to offer him any opposition, he was very civil and attentive to all, no matter how small their orders might be, and he was moreover, in the fullest acceptance of the term, perfectly true and honest in his dealings.

Our narrative opens on a fine autumnal afternoon, shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Carter and their subordinates had finished their dinner. Mrs. Carter had taken up her post behind the counter in order to attend to any chance customer who might enter, and her husband attended by Giles was occupied in placing in a basket the different articles which had been purchased in the morning by families resident in the neighbourhood, and which had now to be sent to their different destinations.

"Let me see," said Mr. Carter, pausing in his task; "what is the next order? Two pounds of moist sugar, a bottle of blacking, and six Bath bricks, for Mrs. Jones."

"You can't send them all to-day," said Mrs.

Carter ; " we have only two Bath bricks in the house."

" How very annoying!" said her lord and master. " This is the first order we have had from the Jones's, and it don't look well not to complete it."

" Why should you worry yourself about that?" said his better half, somewhat tartly. " Send the two we have, and Giles can take the rest to-morrow ; we shall have some more in to-night. Don't forget to tell them, Giles, they shall have them the first thing in the morning."

" Yes, ma'am," said Giles, with a sort of groan ; Bath bricks, owing to their weight, being the *bête noire* of that young gentleman's existence.

" Two pounds of currants, a pound of sugar, two ounces of beeswax, and a small tooth-comb, for the Wilsons," continued Mr. Carter, placing the separate items in the basket as he spoke. " Don't forget, Giles, when you leave them, to say that the packet of pins the servant took away from here last Friday were not paid for, and ask if I am to put them down to Mrs. Wilson's account. Say it civilly, you know, and

that will give her a hint that I don't give servants credit."

"I won't forget, sir," was Giles's reply.

"Two shoe-brushes and another pot of blacking for the Brickmakers' Arms. You had better wait, Giles, after you have given them in for a moment or two, to see if they intend to pay for them; but don't ask for the money. They will pay in the long run, though they are rather long-winded. Let me see; that is all I believe. No, by-the-bye, there are the things ordered last week for the Red House, two two-penny loaves and three candles."

When Mr. Carter had mentioned the last two items his wife gave a short satirical sort of laugh.

"What nonsense," she said, "your sending to that Red House; why, their orders don't pay Giles's shoe-leather. I'd stop that at once if I had my way."

"Come, come, wife," said her good-natured husband, "don't be angry. They have been better customers in their time, and I don't like to neglect them now they are poor. Let us do to others as we would be done by."

"As for my part," said Mrs. Carter, "I don't remember the time when their orders were anything to boast of. We have been here now five years, and all the profit we have made out of them would not buy me a new bonnet. I should not so much mind it if their house was in the road to anybody else's; but they are pretty well a mile beyond the 'Brickmakers' Arms,' and we have no other customer out their way. It's nonsense our carrying business on in that manner."

"Well, well, perhaps you're right. However, the things are now in the basket, so there is no use saying anything more about it. Now, Giles, you may be off, and the sooner you are back the better."

"If we see him back before supper-time," said Mrs. Carter, with a toss of her head, "he will make more haste than he has ever done yet."

Mr. Carter made no further observation, and Giles, with a groan strongly resembling that uttered by an overloaded camel, had the basket lifted on his shoulder and left the shop.

Notwithstanding the recommendation of his

master to be speedy, Giles's movements were of the slowest. Of all that amiable youth's duties, the one he liked least was the one he was then employed on. He had at any time an instinctive aversion to a long walk ; but to one after dinner, and with the accompaniment of a heavy load, he had a particular abhorrence. There was no alternative for him, however ; the work was to be done, and all the consolation he could find was to perform it with as little inconvenience to himself as possible, and this he conscientiously carried out. But even in this good resolution the fates were somewhat against him. If his road had lain in the direction of the town he might have met persons with whom he could converse, and in that he could have found some relief, as he was by nature exceedingly loquacious ; but his route was now directly opposite, and as he advanced travellers became scarce in proportion. As he arrived at the different customers' houses he not only left the goods consigned to them, but at each he rested himself as long as he conveniently could. He left the Bath bricks, as ordered, but utterly forgot the message sent by his master. The packet of pins which had not been paid for

he certainly did remember, and even went beyond his instructions in pressing for immediate payment instead of applying the gentle hint suggested by his master. To this he was possibly instigated by the amiable idea that, being out of humour himself, he was justified in ruffling the temper of the girl to an equal extent. If such really was his intention, he succeeded to perfection, for he not only obtained no money from the damsel, but received instead some most uncomplimentary remarks both on his master and his messenger. At the "Brickmakers' Arms" he carried out his master's orders "to wait" to a far greater extent than was at all needed, for he sat in the porch for more than half an hour, complaining bitterly both of fatigue and thirst, in the vain hope that they might offer him a glass of beer. For some time no notice was taken of his remarks, but at last the landlady asked him if he would like a glass of water—an offer he treated with contempt. Utterly disgusted with the selfishness of human nature, he rose, and taking his basket on his arm, he turned from the high road into that which led to the Red House.

The cross road which Giles now took was the principal thoroughfare between two towns of but moderate importance. It was broad and well kept, although the traffic on it was but small. In fact, Giles that afternoon did not meet an individual the whole of the road, nor did one overtake him, as would certainly have been the case had any one been following him. With no better companion than his own bitter thoughts, he sauntered leisurely along, occasionally relieving the monotony of his melancholy by throwing a stone at some bird that offered a good mark for the exercise of his skill. But, lazy as he was, and tardy as was his pace, he at last arrived at his destination.

Had Giles possessed in the slightest degree a mind more impressionable than his own, he could hardly have escaped being struck with the dreary aspect and dilapidated condition of the Red House, notwithstanding that he generally visited it twice a week. An air of desolation seemed to hang over the whole place; all was either in ruin or bore marks of utter neglect. The house itself stood at some distance from the high road, but was occasionally seen from it through breaks

in the trees. It had formerly been approached through a handsome lodge gate, and along a neatly-kept carriage drive. But the lodge was now in ruins, its roof had fallen in, the panes in its windows were all broken, and its door wrenched from its hinges, probably for fuel to some of the numerous bands of gipsies which occasionally infested the neighbourhood, and who appeared to hold the whole vicinity as an eligible camping-ground, frequently even using the neglected shrubberies of the Red House for that purpose. The lodge gate, which being of iron was not capable of being burnt, and was too heavy and inconvenient to be carried, had, in a spirit of pure mischief, been lifted from its posts and thrown upon the grass beside the drive, leaving the grounds exposed to the ravages of stray cattle. This, however, was of comparatively rare occurrence, for from some inexplicable cause the very brutes of the field seemed to have an instinctive dislike to the place, and preferred browsing on the dusty sward at the roadside.

From the lodge gates to the house the carriage drive proceeded through what had

formerly been tastefully designed and well-kept pleasure grounds; but for several years past these had been allowed to run utterly wild. Rare and beautiful flowering shrubs, it is true, might occasionally be seen, but they were so choked up with rank briars and foul weeds that they had lost all their vigour and were dwindling fast or falling down into the vegetable chaos which surrounded them. All trace of flower beds and borders had long since disappeared, and coarse and rank weedy grass covered the whole space they had occupied. As the visitor approached the house the gravelled road branched off into two walks, one continuing its course towards the principal entrance-door, the other turning off to the left towards a tolerably extensive range of stable-buildings and out-houses. The same air of neglect and desolation which seemed to overshadow the whole place was discernible also in this cluster of buildings. All were in the most dilapidated condition, and evidently fast sinking into ruins. Stable doors were off their hinges, the glass in the window frames was all broken, roofs were falling in, and coarse weeds had sprung up a

foot high in the interstices of the paving, while the stones themselves as well as the walls were covered with a slippery, thick, soft moss.

The house itself was a substantial moderate-sized mansion, built of red brick, from which it had derived the name of the Red House, and, judging from the style of its architecture, had been erected about the latter part of Anne's reign, or in the early part of that of George the First. Its appearance was gloomy and unpromising in the extreme. Its numerous long, gaunt, narrow windows, with frames of solid clumsy carpentry, were glazed with the small dim square panes of glass of the last century, and which from want of paint and care were almost falling from the wood-work which enclosed them. The entrance-door was flush with the front of the house, and had a curious small wicket inserted in one of its upper panels. It was of oak, large and massive, but unpolished, and dried up by many years exposure to the suns of summer and the action of the atmosphere, while the stone steps which led up to it were in such a ruinous condition that great care had to be taken in ascending them, lest

they might fall out of their position. The back and sides of the house were, if possible, in a worse condition than the front. Hardly a pane of glass was whole in any of the windows, while the large conservatory, which had formerly led from the drawing-room to a handsome lawn, had fallen in some years before from the weight of snow in winter, and had been left ever since in the same condition utterly uncared for.

Giles had now reached the entrance-door of this inhospitable-looking abode. After having placed his basket on the most secure stone on the top of the flight of steps, he gave a loud knock with the heavy rusted iron knocker, and then seating himself somewhat uncomfortably on the handle of his basket, he waited patiently till his summons should be answered. He remained thus for some minutes, by no means surprised at the delay, as the inmates of the house were generally even slower in their movements than himself. He beguiled the time by watching the flight of a colony of rooks who had established themselves in the high elm-trees surrounding the house, and being disturbed by the noise he had made were now

testifying their surprise and curiosity in a most excited manner. Still no one came to the door; and as the lengthening shadows of the trees on the grass and his own appetite warned him that supper-time was rapidly approaching, he rose from his seat, and again taking the knocker in his hand he gave such loud proofs of his impatience that the sound re-echoed through the house. No more notice however was taken of this second appeal than of the former, with the exception of still greater agitation among the rooks. Giles's annoyance at the delay was now so great that he took no further notice of the rooks beyond bestowing on them some very uncomplimentary remarks for the noise they were making, for it hindered him in his attempt to listen, though his ear was glued to the wicket, whether anyone was coming.

Several times did Giles repeat his double knock, but without any satisfactory result. At last, almost in despair, he again seated himself on the handle of his basket, that he might reflect more at his ease what course to pursue in the unpleasant predicament he found himself placed in. His position was really a most unpleasant

one. From all appearance there was not the slightest probability of the wicket, through which he was accustomed to communicate with the inmates of the house, being opened to him, even though he remained there till the next morning. On the other hand, if he returned home without having executed his commission, it was extremely possible that Mr. Carter, who was a strict disciplinarian, and who had but slight faith in his servant's veracity, might discredit the whole of his (Giles's) statement, true as it was, and, under the supposition that he had shirked his duty and had not called at the Red House, send him back again. At last that physiological phenomenon which in hard winters drives the robin to seek for succour at the dwellings of man—hunger—began to act so powerfully on Giles that he became desperate, and resolved at all hazards to return home, and undauntedly brave whatever dangers might there await him. Before leaving the house, however, he resolved to make one more effort with the knocker, as a solace to his conscience. He did so, and with such energy that the most terrible brazen thunder produced by the hand of the

most expert London footman sank into utter insignificance when compared to it. Still not the slightest result followed his efforts, and even the rooks, which, during Giles's cogitation, had again sought their nests, as the evening was fast advancing, took no notice of it.

Giles now got fairly desperate, and snatching up his basket he proceeded rapidly homewards. From time to time, however, certain timorous qualms and doubts as to the reception his master would give him passed across his mind, in spite of his energetic whistling and other efforts to drive them away. As he neared home his fears increased, and with them his pace slackened till the quick march he had started with diminished to a melancholy drawl, and when he came in sight of the turnpike gates he came to a dead halt. After waiting for a few minutes in doubt, he at last came to the conclusion that sooner or later he must face his master, and that nothing could be obtained by further delay, with the exception, perhaps, of a more severe scolding. He again moved slowly forward, taking care, however, to keep on the side of the road opposite to the shop, so that he might be able to ascertain

what was passing within it before he entered. The evening was now so far advanced that the two shop candles had been lighted, and by their aid he could see that Mr. Carter was engaged in his postmaster's duties, sorting the letters, and tying them up in little packets, preparatory to the arrival of the mail cart, and that Mrs. Carter was nowhere to be seen. All this fell in admirably with Giles's wishes, for his master had issued strict orders that no one was to speak to him when occupied with the letters, and consequently there would be no questioning for the moment, nor would there be any inspection of the basket by Mrs. Carter.

Having fully made himself master of the position, Giles made a desperate dash forward, entering the shop in great haste, as if the impetus of his homeward march had been so great that he found it impossible to stop himself. The trick, however, did not pass without notice from Mr. Carter, who, however, for the moment said nothing, but contented himself with casting a threatening glance at Giles, and then continued with his letters. The glance was by no means without its effect on Giles, who hastily conceal-

ed his basket under the counter opposite his master, and then turned into the kitchen, where, to his great joy, he found his supper set down for him. Fearing the entrance of Mr. Carter into the kitchen, he immediately seated himself at the table, and ate so voraciously that the little handmaid who was present began to be greatly alarmed lest he should choke himself. Fortunately, however, no such calamity occurred, and Giles succeeded in finishing his supper before his master made his appearance. He immediately commenced a series of uncomplimentary remarks on Giles's habitual idleness and vagabond habits, all of which were listened to silently but sullenly, the good supper that young gentleman had lately consumed having considerably raised his courage. To one of his master's severe remarks Giles had even begun to meditate a reply, which was, however, nipped in the bud by the entrance of Mrs. Carter, who had been on some commission to the town. She immediately commenced a report of her adventures, and the conversation thereon lasted till bedtime. Before they retired for the night, however, Giles received a proof that his behaviour was

neither forgiven nor forgotten by his master. "Although," said Mr. Carter addressing him, "it is too late to-night, sir, for me to explain to you my opinion on your conduct, the subject will keep hot, and I promise you it shall not lose by keeping till to-morrow morning."

Giles, although he made no answer, was by no means displeased at the affair standing over, for he knew full well the difficulty his good-natured master would have in keeping up his anger for twelve whole hours. He now slunk off quietly to his sleeping apartment under one of the counters, where, amidst the collection of odours peculiar to a country general-shop, and in the company of a fine tom cat which Mrs. Carter had kindly provided to frighten away the mice which were in the habit of nestling in his bed-clothes, he soon fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE RED HOUSE.

AS soon as breakfast was over next morning, Giles was called into the presence of his master, not only to render an account of the business transactions given him to execute the day before, but also to receive a lecture on the unwarrantable length of time he occupied when on errands, as well as on his general idle habits. The latter part went off without any very great difficulty. Giles knew that nothing could be gained by arguing the point with his master, and he also distinguished by the tone of Mr. Carter's voice that his anger had already greatly subsided.

"And now, sir, about the things you had to take home yesterday. Have you anything to tell me about them?"

"Nothing, sir. I left them all as you told me."

"Did you speak about the packet of pins not having been paid for?"

"Yes, sir, I did; but the servant put herself in a passion, and said you ought to be ashamed of yourself for troubling her about a trifle of the kind."

"Like her impudence," said Mrs. Carter, entering the shop. "There is always more bother with those servants than their mistresses."

"True enough, wife," said Mr. Carter; "but at the same time, we should bear in mind that if there were no servants there would be no mistresses, and that would not suit our books, you know. Did you leave the message about the Bath bricks as I told you?" he continued, addressing Giles.

"Yes, I did, sir," said Giles, without the slightest hesitation: a lie being but a trifle in his way when occasion required one.

"Well, then, keep your word this morning, and start off with the other four. Where is your basket?"

"Under the counter, sir," said Giles, reddening at the danger of discovery.

Mr. Carter immediately advanced to the spot indicated by Giles, and drew out the basket. Finding in it the two twopenny rolls and the three candles which he had ordered to be taken to the Red House, he angrily demanded of Giles an explanation of the affair.

"If you please, sir, I knocked ever so long at the door, but I could not make anybody hear. It was not my fault if I did not leave the things."

"I more than half suspect," said his master, "that you never went near the house at all."

"Yes, I did, sir; you can ask them at the 'Brickmakers' Arms,' if you please. They saw me go down the road, and said it was a shame to send me so far with such a beggarly order."

"I suspect they were not far wrong," put in Mrs. Carter, "and since he has brought the things back, they may as well remain here. If the Red House folk want to deal with us, let them come here. It's not farther from their house to ours than from ours to theirs."

"That's all very well, wife, and perhaps you are

right on the whole. For the future, I am willing to give up the custom of the Red House, if you wish it. To-day, however, I will be obeyed." Then addressing Giles he continued: "As soon as you have left the Bath bricks, take the two-pennyloaves and candles back again, and see that you get the money for them. They always pay regularly enough though, I must say that."

The Bath bricks were now placed in the basket, and Giles started off on his errand.

A long walk after a good breakfast on a fine autumnal morning not being by any means so objectionable as one after a good dinner, Giles went along contentedly enough. He left the Bath bricks at the house they were intended for, and he then continued his road to the Red House, and in due time arrived at his destination. He first commenced operations by giving a loud postman's knock, knowing full well that that functionary is generally more quickly attended to in his calls than other visitors. Nor was Giles disappointed in his calculation. After waiting patiently for a few moments, listening attentively at the door the while, he fancied he heard some one moving in the house. The

sound suddenly stopped again, and Giles began to doubt whether he had not been mistaken. To assure himself on the point, he again took the knocker in his hand and repeated the post-man's knock even louder than before. The sound of some one slowly moving towards the door he now unmistakably heard, and he took the candles and loaf from his basket ready to hand them through the wicket as soon as it should be opened, as the door had never once been unclosed to him.

The wicket opened, and immediately afterwards the person behind it disappeared, having fallen down heavily on the floor. Giles, greatly surprised, waited anxiously to see if the person would rise again, but she—for it was a woman—remained motionless. Giles now raised himself on tip-toe to see, if possible, through the wicket what had taken place inside. At first he could see nothing, but on looking carefully on the stone floor of the hall he could distinguish a female hand and arm, but, from not being tall enough, he could not see the figure to which they belonged. What to do fairly puzzled the boy, whose intellects at the best were none of

the brightest. Finding he could come to no settled conclusion, he got frightened, and instead of seeking for assistance in the neighbourhood, he left his basket on the door-steps and started home with an amount of celerity most unusual to him, nor did he slacken his speed till he had arrived at his master's house.

Although Giles's account of his adventure, owing to his fright and want of breath, was somewhat obscure, the worthy shopkeeper understood it sufficiently to be aware that something serious had happened, and without more ado he called to his wife to mind the shop during his absence, and putting on his hat, he accompanied Giles at a sharp pace to the Red House. Arrived there, he found Giles's basket still upon the steps, and on looking through the wicket, which was still open, he saw, at a short distance from the door, the motionless form of a woman. At first sight he thought she was dead ; but Giles assured him that she was not in the same position she was in when he had left her, but must have moved since her fall. Mr. Carter therefore concluded that life might not be extinct, and he called loudly several times without eliciting any

answer or detecting the slightest movement to prove that she had heard him.

He now left the door and proceeded rapidly to the public road to seek for assistance. Fortunately two persons were in sight: one, the Rev. Mr. Keats, a clergyman resident in the town, a justice of the peace, and a canon of the Cathedral, to whom Mr. Carter was known; and the other was a farm labourer, who resided some short distance from the Red House. The shopkeeper clearly and concisely explained to the clergyman the position the poor woman was in, and requested his advice what steps to take in the matter.

“We must get into the house by some means,” said Mr. Keats, “and see what we can do for her. Here, my man,” he continued, addressing the farm labourer, “have you anything to do just now?”

“No, sir,” replied the labourer; “I am very sorry to say I have not.”

“Then come and help us. I will see you are paid for anything you do.”

The man willingly accepted the offer, and they all advanced towards the house.

"I thought," said the peasant, as they walked along, "there was something wrong with the old woman, and I have said so many times."

"What made you think so?" inquired the clergyman.

"Because for some nights past no light has been seen in her sitting-room. My mistress noticed it as well. She had been out for a day's charing, and as she came home late at night she looked out for the light in the sitting-room, but it was not to be seen, and after that the night policeman noticed it too."

"Why did you not give an alarm about it, then?"

"Well, you see it was no business of our'n, and besides that, nobody would like to interfere with her, or go near the house, if they could help it."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," said the man somewhat sheepishly. "Perhaps because they say the house is haunted. Not that I believe it myself."

"Who told you that nonsense?" said the clergyman.

"I don't remember who told me, but that's what they say about here."

"By whom do they say it is haunted?"

"Well, they say the old woman sits up all night playing cards with the devil," replied the labourer, "and that she sleeps all the day-time."

"This appears to be a very serious offence indeed," said Mr. Keats, smiling, "and one that I, as a clergyman, ought to take up without a moment's delay."

By this time they had reached the door, and the clergyman, looking through the wicket, still saw the form stretched upon the floor of the hall. When he removed his head, Mr. Carter looked in.

"Is she in the same spot she was in when you left her?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"She is, sir," was the reply; "but if I am not very much mistaken she has moved one of her arms since I saw her. Yes, I am certain she has. Giles, look in and tell me whether I am not right."

Giles did as he was desired, and fully corroborated his master's statement.

"Then," said Mr. Keats, "we must contrive

to get into the house immediately in some way. Pray God we may yet be able to save the poor creature's life."

They now left the front door and examined the windows on the basement floor, to find one through which they might with the least inconvenience enter into the house. This was a work of some short time, for although most of the panes were broken, all the window-shutters were closed, and barricaded more or less effectually. At last they selected one whose fastenings appeared to be more insecure than the rest. The countryman then quickly obtained a stake from a fence near by, and by using it as a lever, they soon contrived to effect an entrance. With some little difficulty, owing to the darkness of the passages, they found their way into the hall; and raising the prostrate woman from the floor, they bore her carefully into the sitting-room and placed her gently on a sofa. The clergyman, who like most of his profession knew something of medicine, felt for her pulse, but failed to detect it. He then placed his hand on her heart, and at last, with great difficulty, distinguished a slight low throbbing.

"Thank heaven, life is not extinct!" he said; "we may perhaps be able to save her. You, my man," he continued, addressing the labourer, "go as fast as you can to the nearest public-house, and get me some brandy, or any other spirit which may be handy; and you, my lad, gallop off at once to the town and find out Doctor Wilson, who lives in the Close. Give him my card, and tell him I should feel greatly obliged by his coming here as quickly as possible. Tell him to come himself if he possibly can; if not, to send some one else. If you obey me diligently, I will give you a shilling for your trouble."

The labourer and Giles started off on their respective errands, while the clergyman and Mr. Carter remained with the poor woman, who as yet showed no external signs of animation. The former continued to stand by her side, his anxiety and impatience for the return of his messengers being somewhat dimmed by the sympathy he now began to feel for his patient. There was something particularly interesting in her appearance. Although certainly in the decline of life (she was evidently fully fifty years

of age), her hair grey and dishevelled, and her dress scanty, poor, and ragged, there was such an expression of profound sorrow over her pallid features that it fairly went to his heart. Without knowing a word of her history, he instinctively felt that her life had been a blameless one, and that her present condition had been caused more by her misfortunes than her faults. He inquired of his companion if he knew anything of her family, but he received the somewhat unsatisfactory reply that he knew nothing of her whatever, beyond that she and an old woman resided together in the house, and even that he knew only from the statement of his errand-boy, Giles. Some few months since the poor woman before them was in the habit of coming to his shop to make purchases of provisions and household necessities, but always in a very small way, and she then used to take them away with her. She was always very taciturn, avoiding all conversation. About three months since she inquired if he would have any objection to let his boy call two or three times a week at her house for orders, as she found the walk very fatiguing. He acceded

to her request, but she would never let the lad into the house, but gave her orders through the wicket, and received the goods by it as well, always punctually paying for them at the time. Latterly her orders had been very small indeed, in fact they were hardly worth executing, and he often feared she was getting very poor. Somewhere he had heard that she had formerly been very respectable, but from his own knowledge he knew nothing.

Mr. Keats cast a hasty glance around him. The room was large and lofty. The sole furniture consisted of the sofa upon which the poor woman was stretched, two torn and much worn antique easy chairs, one on each side of the fire-place, a few ordinary chairs, which, though old-fashioned, had been well made, and a soiled mahogany dining table, with a large open Bible upon it at one corner, and a common brass candlestick, in which a candle had burnt out, in the centre. The paper on the walls was faded to an extent which rendered it difficult to discern what had been its original pattern; the fire-place was rusted and dilapidated, and without fuel; and the curtainless windows had evi-

dently not been cleaned for months, possibly for years. Poverty and neglect were, in fact, stamped on everything in the room.

The labourer now returned with some spirits in a glass, and the clergyman, not without some difficulty, contrived to insert a few drops into her mouth. Small as the quantity was it was evidently not without some beneficial effect, and the dose was repeated. Animation now began perceptibly to return, and the kind-hearted clergyman congratulated himself on the result of his experiment. He next took a small piece of bread from the little loaf in Giles's basket, and after soaking it in the spirits, he succeeded in placing it in her mouth. He then perceived from the mechanical movement of the muscles of the cheek, that she felt its presence. By degrees the vital powers became more apparent, but still no return to consciousness could be detected. Mr. Keats hoped on, however, and continued the stimulant.

Presently the sound of carriage wheels was heard on the gravel road leading to the house, and on looking out of window Mr. Keats, to his great joy, saw the doctor's brougham approach-

ing. It stopped at the door, and Doctor Wilson himself alighted from it. With merely a nod and a friendly look at the clergyman, he walked straight to the sofa on which the patient was stretched. He felt her pulse, pressed his hand on her heart, and then, without speaking, carefully examined the pupil of her eye.

"You have been giving her some spirit," he said at last, examining the glass which had contained it. "You have done well, and it is probable you may have saved her life by it."

"What do you think is the matter with her, sir?" inquired Mr. Carter.

"There is but one conclusion I can at present arrive at," was the reply. "Judging from her emaciated form, poverty-struck appearance, and the powerful effects of the few drops of spirits you have given her, I am afraid she is simply suffering from starvation."

"Do you know anything of her?" asked Mr. Keats.

"Very little, indeed. Several months since I attended her mother, a very aged woman, on her death-bed. I suspected then they were very poor, but I had no idea there was any

danger of an affair like this. I understood, by-the-bye, that this poor woman was to leave the house immediately after her mother's funeral, but I forget from whom I heard the report. One thing, however, I remarked about her, was that she hardly seemed in her right mind. Not insane, understand me, but utterly bewildered, probably by misfortune, of which I have heard she has had her full share. There appeared about her an air of great respectability not un-mixed with pride, which gave me the impression that she would possibly consider it an act of indiscretion if I inquired into her family affairs. Now you know as much about her as I do."

"Probably not," said Mr. Keats, "or you must be ignorant of her name."

"From the fact of her wearing no wedding ring, I presume it is the same as her mother's, which was Thornbury," replied the doctor.

"I am certain they were very poor," said Mr. Carter. "I now remember having heard that after her mother's death, and before the funeral, she went in the dusk of the evening more than once to a pawnbroker's shop in the town to raise some money on her plate, a few pieces at

a time, which I daresay was to pay for the expenses she had incurred."

During this conversation the doctor had been engaged in inserting into his patient's mouth small quantities of the spirit. At last, evidently with great difficulty, she gave a deep sigh, and immediately afterwards her lungs slowly commenced their action.

"I think we are safe for the moment," said the doctor.

"Thank God for it," said Mr. Keats.

"Don't you think, sir," said Mr. Carter, "that we had better ascertain for certain whether there is any one else in the house? From what Giles has told me, there were two women living here together, one much older than the other, though he certainly has not spoken much about them lately."

"Certainly we ought to be well informed on that point," said the doctor. "And now you mention it, I remember when I was attending Mrs. Thornbury there was an old servant who nursed her. I was very much struck with her appearance at the time, as there was a certain air of almost Quakerish neatness about her. I

remarked also that she was much distressed at her mistress's death, and wept bitterly over her. Possibly she may now be in the house, bed-ridden and ill. If you two will go over the house and seek for her, I will remain here with my patient."

Mr. Keats and the shopkeeper agreed, and they immediately commenced their search.

If the sitting-room which they had left had borne on it the marks of utter poverty and neglect, it was a model of neatness and comfort when compared with the other parts of the house they visited. Room after room they entered, some of which had possibly not been opened for years. The atmosphere of those whose windows were unbroken, was almost stifling from the accumulated dust which arose in clouds from the mere action of opening the doors. The chambers on the first floor, though somewhat scantily furnished, were in tolerably decent order when compared with those on the second. These were crammed with all sorts of useless, dilapidated furniture, in a singularly damp and mouldy state, evidently arising from water from the rooms above them having fil-

tered through the ceiling, many parts of which had fallen down on the floor beneath it. On ascending to the third floor, this crowding of the one beneath it was partly accounted for. When the roof first began to get out of order and to let in the rain, no attempt had been made to repair it; but to remedy the inconvenience tubs had been placed to catch the water, and the furniture of the rooms was removed to the story below. As the tubs when full were never emptied, it naturally followed that the floor soon became flooded, and the water made its way through it.

Not finding the old servant in any of these rooms, Mr. Keats and his companion descended again, but before giving up all hope they resolved to search the basement floor. Here also there was the same appearance of poverty and neglect. The kitchen range was so rusted that it could not certainly have been used for years; indeed it was easy to perceive that the whole floor had long since been in disuse. Nothing was here found that could afford the slightest clue to the old servant's whereabouts, and they ascended to the ground floor. They

then entered a room (the library) they had not yet visited. Some of the books were still upon their shelves, the others were piled up together in one corner of the room, and all were covered with a thick layer of dust. After the occupants of the house had determined that the basement floor should no longer be used, they had turned the library into a kitchen. Here it might have been expected that the gloom which pervaded the other part of the house would be wanting. Such, however, was far from being the case. It formed no exception to the rest. The small stove, which had been badly set by some inexperienced hand, was falling away from the brickwork which surrounded it. The kitchen battery was of the poorest description, and out of repair; while the crockery, which was placed on the shelves from which the books had been removed, was in no better condition, being cracked and broken, and only a few pieces amongst it belonging to the same set.

They again entered the sitting-room, where they found the doctor still watching his patient, and they informed him of the fruitless result of their search.

The poor woman was evidently stronger than when they had left her, but still totally unconscious.

"We must now," said the doctor, "determine on some plan of action. My patient is certainly recovering, but it would be dangerous to attempt to move her just yet. I have sent the labourer for some milk for her, and when he returns I will endeavour to make her swallow some of it. In the meantime," he continued, addressing the clergyman, "you had better take my brougham and go to Mrs. Mitchell's. You know whom I mean—the person who was lately the matron of the County Hospital. She now lets lodgings for invalids, and a good, kind, attentive creature she is. Tell her I want her bedroom on the first floor for a patient of mine who is very ill. She must prepare it for her reception immediately, as I may want it in an hour's time."

"But what will become of the house when we have left it? There ought certainly to be some one to take care of it," said Mr. Keats.

"You are quite right; I never thought of that," replied the doctor. "We ought not to

leave it without some one to take charge of it, as you say."

"Would not the labourer answer our purpose?" said Mr. Keats. "I daresay for a trifle he would willingly remain in the house."

"But we know nothing of him," said the doctor; "besides, I do not like the idea of taking any responsibility on myself in the matter."

"I should think, sir," said Mr. Carter, "the better way would be, after Mr. Keats has seen Mrs. Mitchell, for him to go to the inspector of police, tell him all that has taken place, and ask his advice on the subject. I think it is very likely he would send a policeman to take care of the house till the right owner turns up, or the poor woman can explain herself."

"That is a capital suggestion," said the doctor. "Get the inspector by all means to send a policeman, if you can. He can come back in my carriage. I will, in the meantime, remain with my patient, and, as soon as she is strong enough, I will bring her with me to her lodgings."

Mr. Keats, accompanied by the shopkeeper, now started off in the brougham, leaving the

doctor at his post. On the road Mr. Carter stopped at his own residence, and Mr. Keats proceeded onwards to Mrs. Mitchell, whom he was fortunate enough to find at home. Her first-floor being disengaged, she willingly agreed to receive the doctor's patient, and promised, as he desired, that everything should be ready for her in an hour's time. Mr. Keats then called on the inspector of police, who promised to send a policeman, and one was immediately dispatched to the Red House in the doctor's carriage, with instructions not leave the place till further orders.

"There was always something about that house I could not understand," said the inspector. "I should have thought for some time past it had been uninhabited, if my men had not told me there was a candle burning all night in one of the sitting-rooms, but was never seen in any of the bed-rooms. More than once I sent a man to make some unimportant inquiry in the daytime, for the purpose of finding out who inhabited it, but no one ever answered the knock."

"What sort of reputation had the place?" inquired Mr. Keats.

“Oh! the foolish people about there used to say it was haunted, and told all sorts of absurd stories about it, all of which were, of course, lies.”

“Who formerly occupied the house?”

“It belonged, I have heard, to an old gentleman of the name of Thornbury, now dead, and the present owner cannot be found. He went abroad, I understand, some years ago, and nothing has been known of him since. At the same time I am a poor authority on the subject, as I have, as you know, only been here three years, and my duties are principally confined to the town.”

The reverend gentleman then left the police-station, and having now performed the whole of the duties assigned to him, he returned to his house. As it was now considerably past his dinner-hour, and his prolonged absence having caused a great deal of anxiety to his wife and two daughters, they anxiously inquired the cause. In reply he gave them a full account of his adventures at the Red House, and the danger the poor woman was in when he left her, although somewhat recovered. The ladies, as

may naturally be supposed, were greatly interested in his narrative. They readily volunteered to render her every assistance in their power, and proposed starting off immediately to Mrs. Mitchell's in order to receive the poor creature when the doctor should arrive with her. Knowing full well that too many people round a sick person was fully as prejudicial as too few, Mr. Keats told them it would be far better for them not to interfere in the matter for the present, and, by way of allaying their anxiety, he promised that as soon as dinner was over he would go over to the doctor's and see if he had arrived with his patient, and if so he would ask him whether Mrs. Mitchell needed any assistance. For his own part, he believed the doctor would prefer that his patient should be perfectly quiet, and have no excitement. The young ladies and their mamma admitted the justice of this reasoning, and contented themselves with divers speculations as to what could have been the cause of the poor woman's misfortunes, for all of which, it is needless to say, they had not the slightest data to go upon.

In the meantime the doctor had been unre-

mitting in his attention to his patient. Fortunately the labourer had been able to obtain some milk from a neighbouring cottage, and with some of the spirit mixed with it he contrived to raise the poor woman's strength considerably. Still, however, she showed not the slightest return to consciousness. It could hardly be said that her mental faculties were in a state of prostration ; she seemed rather to be in the deep sleep of a greatly fatigued person in feeble health. He attempted to rouse her sufficiently to understand that he wished to remove her from the house. He desired her, if she understood, but was unable to speak, to raise her hand ; but she evidently did not hear him, so profound was her slumber. In due time his brougham returned with the policeman in it, and he now resolved to take all responsibility, and remove his patient to Mrs. Mitchell's. He put the policeman in possession of the house, and after remunerating the labourer for the trouble he had been put to, he took the emaciated form of the poor woman in his arms and placed her gently in his carriage. Having seated himself beside her, the coachman drove as

rapidly back to the town as the jaded energies of his horse would allow. Nor was the journey performed without considerable anxiety to the worthy doctor, the sitting position his patient was in being most objectionable in her condition. Thanks, however, to his great care, and the judicious use of the stimulants he had brought with him, he succeeded in reaching Mrs. Mitchell's without any accident, where for the present we will leave his patient, in good and skilful hands, and tended with the greatest care and attention, not only by her landlady, but by the family of the Rev. Mr. Keats as well.

CHAPTER III.

THE THORNBURY FAMILY.

MR. EDGAR THORNBURY, the father of our heroine, who was introduced in so extraordinary a manner to the reader in the last chapter, came into possession of the Red House property, as well as a moderate sum of money in the Funds, by the death of his father, in the year 1819. The estate consisted of three copyhold farms, held under the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral (each containing about two hundred acres of land), together with the twenty acres of meadow and park land attached to the mansion, which was freehold, and entailed on the next male heir. The ready money did not exceed eight thousand pounds, but Mr. Thornbury was an only child, and the whole property he inherited was unencumbered by family settlements of any description. The estate, though

of no very great value, had been held for some centuries by the family. It was this circumstance principally which induced Mr. Thornbury to reside upon it, although he was naturally of a cheerful disposition, with which the sombre aspect of the house and its surroundings did not very well accord. At the time he came into his fortune, he was a fine, good-looking, healthy young fellow, about twenty-four years of age, a bold rider, and passionately fond of field sports.

Mr. Thornbury's father, after the death of his wife, which took place about ten years prior to his own decease, had led a very secluded life. He associated with none of the gentry in the neighbourhood, and saw but little of his own tenants beyond receiving them at his house on rent-day, and making occasional calls for the purpose of ascertaining whether they were farming properly the land they held. It may, therefore, be easily imagined that his son, who resided constantly with him, had but little acquaintance with the world when he came into his inheritance.

He had but one foible in which he was likely

to indulge to any great extent, and that was horse-racing. He had never, of course, entertained the idea of running racers of his own, but he had a natural love for every sport connected with horses. Accordingly, he attended all the races in his own county, and betted moderately, but with considerable success. His skill and good fortune having given him courage, he resolved to extend his operations, and he no longer contented himself with isolated bets, but commenced to keep a regular book. Success still attended him, and he hazarded larger sums. He was guided to a considerable extent in his betting by a person of showy exterior and plausible manners, whose acquaintance he had made on a race-course. This gentleman, at last, obtained such an ascendancy over Mr. Thornbury, that he scarcely ever made a bet without consulting him on the subject, and his prognostication was generally followed by such good fortune as to increase still more the favourable impression he had made on Mr. Thornbury, who soon not only looked upon him as a racing oracle, but conceived a warm friendship for him. He invited him to the Red House, and

treated him as a favoured guest, showing him every attention in his power. In return, the new-made friend invited him to spend a fortnight in a neat little box he had near Doncaster. They could then attend the approaching races, and be very snug and comfortable together. The idea fell in admirably with Mr. Thornbury's views, as he had long desired to visit Doncaster, and the invitation was accepted.

The time arrived for their departure, and they travelled together to Doncaster. Mr. Thornbury was somewhat disappointed at the appearance of his friend's house, which was only a very humble cottage near the race-course. But as he was informed by his friend that it was merely rented in order that he might have a place near the course, when he wished to attend the different races there, the excuse was accepted. The morning after their arrival, Mr. Thornbury's friend introduced him to several sporting gentlemen, all of whom he assured him were as safe as the bank. With these gentlemen Mr. Thornbury made several heavy bets, not only on the races which were to come off next day, but on the days following as well. In fact, he contriv-

ed to make an excellent book, one which did his knowledge of the doctrine of probabilities great credit.

The next day's races came off, and Mr. Thornbury, on making up his book in the evening, found he was a winner to a very considerable amount—on paper. He, of course, paid what losses he had made, and received the amounts owing to him, the principal part, however, in I O U's, the proportion in ready money being very small indeed.

He had betted very heavily on the second day's races, and began to feel rather uneasy as to the result. Nor was this wholly without reason, for on making up his book in the evening, he found that he had that day lost between seven and eight hundred pounds. His companion attempted to cheer him with some common-place remarks about the impossibility of being always a winner, and reminded him of the excellent book he had made on the third day's races. Although the loss somewhat annoyed Mr. Thornbury, he had sufficient philosophy to perceive that it would be quite useless to grieve over it, and he proceeded tranquilly

to make some alterations in his dress, as he and his friend were to dine with a gentleman, an acquaintance of the latter, and pass a pleasant evening together.

They met, and formed a very happy little party. The only other guest, besides Mr. Thornbury and his friend, was a gentleman also connected with the turf. He was, moreover, an excellent companion, well acquainted with all the sporting celebrities, and possessed a vast fund of anecdote and humour. The dinner was cooked in first-rate style, and the wines were excellent; indeed, to say truth, Mr. Thornbury indulged to a greater extent than was prudent, yet without being really intoxicated. Nor was he quite so much to blame in this as he would have been in the present day. In those days the absurd custom prevailed of gentlemen challenging each other to take wine, and on this occasion it was much indulged in by Mr. Thornbury's companions, who seemed capable of consuming any quantity without danger of inebriety.

Dinner over, they sat for some time at dessert, and, conversation beginning to flag, one of the

party proposed a rubber of whist to pass away the time. Mr. Thornbury made no objection, in fact his brain was already somewhat confused, but the two others said they did not feel inclined to play just then. They were tired, they said, and the events of the day were so fresh before them, that they should not be able to think of the game if they took a hand. As, however, the proposer was their host, if he really wished it they would offer no further objection. So the game was begun. In the first rubber, Mr. Thornbury and his friend were partners. They played for guinea points, as well as betted heavily on the rub. Mr. Thornbury and his partner were winners, and they netted a considerable sum—a result which put their opponents somewhat out of humour. At the second rubber, the tide of fortune turned, Thornbury and his friend being losers. They changed partners, and fortune again favoured Mr. Thornbury, so that before supper was announced he had won more than one hundred pounds.

After supper a steaming bowl of punch was placed upon the table, and the friends indulged in it pretty freely. In fact, when Mr. Thorn-

bury rose to take his seat again at the card-table he was nearly intoxicated. The idea flashed across his disturbed brain that, as he was evidently in luck that night, he might be able to recoup himself for his day's losses, and he proposed an increase of the stakes. No objection being made by the others, they again commenced playing. Mr. Thornbury lost the first rubber, as well as a heavy bet he had made upon it, but he endeavoured to recover this by a still heavier bet on the next game. He played on for some time, generally losing, but consoling himself the while with repeated glasses of punch. In this way he continued to play, his mind becoming gradually more and more obscured, till at last he lost all consciousness, and sank under the table utterly insensible.

When he awoke next morning he found himself in bed in the house of his host of the previous evening. He felt feverish and thirsty. His tongue was dry as a potsherd, and he suffered from a violent throbbing headache. A servant knocked at the door of his room, with a message from the master of the house, inform-

ing him that if he (Mr. Thornbury) intended to go on the race-course that day, he had better rise immediately, else he would be too late. Mr. Thornbury told the man to thank his master for the information, and to say that he would be ready in half an hour at latest. Even then, however, he could hardly summon sufficient courage to rise from his bed, and when he did so, he felt so dizzy that he nearly fell senseless on the floor. By dint of bathing his head for some time in cold water he managed in some measure to arrange his ideas. When dressed, he descended to the breakfast-room, where he found his host, to whom he apologised for his behaviour on the previous night.

“Don’t think anything more about it, my good fellow,” was the reply. “It was an accident, which I daresay has befallen every one of us at one time or other. But now, if you intend going with us to-day, you had better get your breakfast as soon as you can.”

Mr. Thornbury took the hint, and seated himself at the table. He had no appetite, however; his headache returned, and he laboured under a most distressing nausea. He tried to conceal

his feelings, and rose from the table, saying that he was now quite ready. But he had no sooner uttered the words than a sensation came over him of so oppressive a character that he was obliged to seat himself in an easy-chair, that he might not fall on the floor.

"Thornbury," said his host, "you are not in marching order to-day; you had better stop at home. A couple of hours' nap on the sofa will do you a good deal of good. Remain then quietly here; we shall be home to dinner by seven o'clock. We can then arrange our little accounts of yesterday evening, and you can afterwards have your revenge, if you wish it."

Thornbury followed his friend's advice, and, throwing himself on a sofa, slept for several hours. When he awoke he felt considerably refreshed, and began to think over the events of the preceding evening. The remark which his host had made on leaving the room about arranging their accounts of the evening before, and giving him his revenge if he wished it, caused him some uneasiness. Of all that had taken place before supper he had a tolerably

clear idea, but the remainder of the night's transactions were to him only a mass of tangled confusion, which it was impossible for him to unravel. His losses on the race-course the day before also caused him annoyance; but that, after a little reflection, lessened considerably. He felt he had lost his money fairly, and he had no just cause for discontent. Besides, it was very probable that he might be more fortunate that day, as he had some heavy and well-calculated bets on the event.

By dinner time he had fully recovered himself. He heard, with great equanimity, the somewhat unsatisfactory intelligence that on that day's transactions he had lost about two hundred pounds. During the meal the conversation ran principally on races which were yet to come off, those who had won that day, what horses were in favour, and other matters connected with the turf. When dinner was over, and the dessert placed upon the table, one of the party said,

"Now, Thornbury, we may as well arrange about yesterday evening. Here are your I O U's for your losses to me, and you would oblige me

by giving me a cheque for the money, as I can assure you I have had some heavy pulls upon me to-day."

So saying he produced several pieces of paper bearing Thornbury's signature for different sums. Their host also, and the other gentlemen, did the same, placing their different memoranda before him, the whole demands upon him amounting to little less than one thousand pounds.

Mr. Thornbury was for some moments utterly aghast at their behaviour, but, soon recovering himself, he took up the different papers from the table and quietly and carefully examined each, without passing any remark upon them. The person who had first addressed him on the subject of his debts took umbrage at this behaviour.

"Do you imagine, sir," he said, "that the papers I have given you are forgeries, that you scrutinize them so carefully?"

Mr. Thornbury continued his examination for a moment longer, and then coolly replied,

"The signatures are evidently mine. I consider, however, that I was perfectly justified in examining them so closely, as I have no recol-

lection whatever of the transactions to which they refer."

"Transactions to which they refer!" said the other indignantly. "Why, you gave them for the money you lost yesterday evening."

"My dear Thornbury," said the host, "it is all fair and straightforward, I assure you: and, more than that, as soon as you have settled these claims, you can, if you please, have your revenge this evening."

"Thank you," said Thornbury, coolly, and still keeping his temper, "but I must decline playing again with those who do not consider it beneath them to obtain documents of such a description from an intoxicated man."

Each person present took this insult as personally applied to himself, and each stepped forward to resent it.

"Stop, gentlemen," said the host, in a tone of authority; "as the transactions to which Mr. Thornbury alludes took place under my roof, I must have precedence in the matter. To consider it possible, sir," he continued, addressing Mr. Thornbury, "that I would allow a guest of mine, while in a state of intoxication, to sign an

I O U, is simply to offer me a gross and gratuitous insult ; and I must request you either to retract your expression, or make me an apology."

"Let us clearly understand each other, gentlemen," said Mr. Thornbury. "How you came by my signatures for such heavy sums I know not ; suffice it to say that I acknowledge them without hesitation to be mine, and I intend paying the money, so no more need be said about the matter unless you desire it. But, at the same time, if any one of you is under the impression that I am a man to be bullied, he is grossly mistaken. Let us, however, do one thing at a time. I will for the moment put the question of the payment of the money aside, and if any gentleman present thinks himself affronted by my remark, I beg he will consider me immediately at his service."

"Come, come," said one ; "let there be no quarrelling ; we need say no more about the matter. I have no doubt Mr. Thornbury will at once give us cheques for the different amounts owing us."

"That I cannot do," said Thornbury. "I owe as much on the races as will absorb the whole

of the ready money I have got at my banker's. As soon as those bets are settled, I will write to my agent in London, and request him to sell out of the Funds as much as will meet your claims. I intend immediately taking lodgings in the town, and I shall not leave it till I have paid you all the full amount I am indebted to you."

"But possibly," said the host, in so amicable a tone, that it contrasted strangely with his late indignant manner—"but possibly the better plan would be for you to give us your promissory notes at a short date, as we may not find it convenient to remain here till your agent sends the money."

"I will do nothing of the kind. The money I owe shall be considered purely as a debt of honour, or I will dispute it altogether. That is my determination, and it is a waste of time for us to hold any further conversation on the subject. Are you willing to accept the terms I offer?"

Finding no other arrangement could be entered into with Mr. Thornbury, they at last accepted his offer, and he quitted the house with the de-

termination to drop all acquaintance with the class of men he had just left, and never again make a bet on a horse-race—a resolution he ever afterwards rigidly adhered to.

As the town was crowded with visitors, Mr. Thornbury had some difficulty in providing himself with an apartment, but at last he succeeded. He engaged the first floor above a small but respectable linendraper's shop, kept by a widow, a Quakeress. The day after removing to it, he began to pay his different debts, which, together with the sum he had lost at the whist-table, considerably exceeded two thousand pounds. He drew cheques for the bets he had made on the races, which consumed the whole of his available balance at his banker's, and he wrote to his agents in London directing them not only to sell out as much money from the Funds as would suffice for the balance, but to send him the address of some respectable solicitor in Doncaster, in whose hands he could place the duty of settling with his whist-table creditors.

Both commissions were executed in the course of a week or ten days, the amounts were paid, and Mr. Thornbury's mind was at rest on the

point. He consoled himself with the idea that, if he had paid dearly for his experience, the lesson was the less likely to be forgotten.

Although everything connected with his gambling transactions was now settled, Mr. Thornbury made no attempt to leave Doncaster. He had become much interested in the family of his landlady, and he took great pleasure in their society. His first impulse to cultivate their acquaintance arose from mere curiosity. It was the first time he had been thrown into any sort of relationship with the sect of Quakers, and it can easily be understood that their steady, sedate, amiable manners, together with their peculiar dress and quaint Bible phraseology, would please him greatly. The widow, Mrs. Watkins, was an intelligent, bustling, good-humoured, handsome old lady, very strictly attached to the tenets of her sect. Her establishment consisted of her only daughter, Charity, a very pretty young woman, and a sort of half servant, half shopwoman, named Deborah, also a member of the Society of Friends. Mrs. Watkins' principal duty was to attend to the business, in which she was occasionally assisted by her daughter

and Deborah, the latter having especial charge of the domestic economy of the house, which in every respect was a perfect specimen of Quaker order, cleanliness, and neatness.

Mr. Thornbury had hardly been a week in the house before the ladies began to entertain great good feeling towards their lodger, whom they held to be a very well-conducted young man, and the feeling was more than reciprocated by Mr. Thornbury. He used to spend his evenings with them, and some of the happiest moments of his life were passed in the little parlour behind the shop. He at last got so interested in the widow and her daughter, and their primitive ways, that one Sunday he requested they would take him with them to their meeting-house. At first they readily assented; but, after a little reflection, the widow began to have compunctions, and would willingly, for various reasons, have retracted her promise, could she have done so honourably. But the promise had been given, and she was a woman of too much integrity to break it.

The meeting being a silent one, Thornbury had ample opportunity for reflection. It would

be wrong to say that religion entered very deeply into his thoughts on the occasion. They were concentrated on Charity, and no other object. Mr. Thornbury had, in fact, fallen deeply in love with the fair Quakeress, and he resolved, if possible, to make her his wife.

The meeting over, Thornbury accompanied Mrs. Watkins and her daughter back to their house. On the road a little circumstance occurred which for the moment somewhat startled and annoyed him. He walked by the side of Charity, and attempted to enter into conversation with her, but with scant success. True, she answered every observation he made, but very shortly, and without turning her head towards him when she spoke. This was done in so marked a manner that he began to fear he must unknowingly have offended her, and under this impression he remained the whole of the day, for he saw her no more after they had entered the house. Charity was by no means displeased with her admirer—far from it; but, as she knew that she was watched by many a pair of female eyes, she was simply endeavouring to make it appear that she was offering him

no encouragement, and that his attentions were rather displeasing to her than otherwise.

Thornbury, although somewhat mortified at Charity's behaviour, was still resolved to do all he could to make her his wife, but he was much puzzled as to the way to commence operations. The rigid ideas of propriety held both by the damsel and her mother, together with their secluded habits and strong sectarian principles, put it out of the question for him to offer to treat them to any amusements. Moreover, a severe-looking female Elder (the mother of several unmarried daughters) had visited the house, and been closeted for some time with Mrs. Watkins and Charity, and he noticed that after that they showed him considerably fewer little friendly attentions than he had been used to receive at their hands, and it was evident that Charity purposely avoided meeting him; but whether that proceeded from her own sense of propriety, or her mother's injunction, did not appear.

The difficulties thus thrown in Thornbury's way stimulated him to exertion rather than otherwise. He now resolved to conquer by in-

creasing his personal attractions. He paid much attention to his toilet, purchased some very expensive articles of jewelry, used an immense amount of perfumery, wore a coat with the waist almost up to his shoulders, and assumed something of that swaggering air and manner much affected by the "Bucks" of the period. Those attempts, however, resulted in complete failure. Charity, girl as she was, held the pomps and vanities of this wicked world in utter contempt, and her mother's dislike to them amounted to absolute abhorrence. The poor fellow even sank considerably in Deborah's good opinion. She had hitherto been his warm friend, for she had admired him greatly for his steady, quiet, and affable manners, and she had frequently spoken highly of him to Charity; but even Deborah could not defend his foppishness.

At last, finding his suit by no means forwarded by this course, he resolved to practise it no longer. He again became the quiet, unostentatious, sensible young fellow he had been before. Good effects immediately followed the change. Mrs. Watkins began to speak to him

in a kindlier tone; Charity, accidentally of course, met him more frequently, and always answered the remarks he made in a friendly tone; and he again rose in Deborah's good graces. Still nothing decisive had been accomplished, and he was at a loss what fresh step to take in the matter.

At length one morning, after having been a very long time over his breakfast, eating little, but meditating a great deal to little purpose about his love affair, he took up his hat to leave the house, thinking some bright idea might perhaps strike him if he took a solitary romantic walk into the country. Having descended the stairs, he was passing through the shop, when he noticed that there was no one in it. Looking round, however, he saw Charity sitting in the little back parlour, with her face at a pane of glass which had been inserted into the partition, so that a surveillance might be kept upon customers entering. Such a beautiful picture did she make, with her neat little cap on her head, that Thornbury found it impossible to pass on without speaking to her, and he turned back and entered the little parlour. He found

Charity alone, her mother, as she informed him, having gone to market ; she expected her back, however, in the space of half an hour, if he wished to speak to her. Thornbury was thinking what answer to make, when, without being afterwards able to relate how it came about, he suddenly found himself seated in a chair by Charity's side, her hand in his, which she was making no attempt to withdraw. Having had the courage to effect so much, the rest was comparatively easy to him. When he had found his tongue, he expressed with great fluency the profound affection he had for her, touched modestly on his own qualifications, expatiated largely on hers, and concluded by asking her permission to pay his addresses to her. Charity replied, in a proper and becoming manner, that she was so greatly surprised at his offer that she hardly knew how to reply to it. She did not understand, she said, how it was possible for him to have conceived so much affection for her, having known her for so short a time, with many other stereotyped phrases of the same description, the whole concluding by a reference to her mother, by whose advice she

would be guided in the matter, admitting (evidently to prevent his being driven to despair) that she had certainly a great esteem for him. The half hour having nearly elapsed, he requested Charity would tell her mother that he wished to speak to her on some business of great importance, and that he would call on her in the afternoon, shrewdly believing that the daughter would be sure to inform her mother of the purport of his visit, and thus relieve him from the great difficulty of opening the question.

Thornbury now left the house with the air and step of a conqueror. He relinquished his intended romantic walk into the country, and contented himself instead with strolling about the town, till he began to feel fatigued. He then entered a news-room, and tried to occupy himself with the newspapers ; but read he could not, and at last he gave up the attempt, and again strolled about the streets till it was time for him to keep his appointment with the old lady.

The meeting passed off, to a certain degree, satisfactorily enough. Mrs. Watkins frankly

told him that she felt much gratified by his offer, but at the same time there were some difficulties in the way which had to be cleared up before she could possibly entertain it. She must, in the first place, consult with some of the Friends on the subject, especially as he was not one of her own sect.

Things, however, did not progress so favourably as might have been wished. The Elder whom Mrs. Watkins requested to inquire about Mr. Thornbury was the husband of the Quakeress who had been closeted so long with her and Charity after Thornbury's visit to the meeting-house. Unfortunately, the only person he could find who knew anything about Mr. Thornbury was a clerk in the house of the Doncaster solicitor whom Thornbury had employed to arrange his gambling debts. Of course the conclusion the Elder arrived at from his conversation with the attorney's clerk was anything but favourable to Mr. Thornbury; and he, without any reservation, communicated this to Mrs. Watkins.

Mr. Thornbury was thunderstruck when Mrs. Watkins frankly told him that she had heard, upon

good authority, that he was both a gambler and a drunkard. Instead of indignantly denying the accusation, he with great good sense gave a true account of the manner in which he had been entrapped by a gang of swindlers ; that he had paid the amounts he had lost ; and that he had resolutely determined never to make another bet on a race, and as a gentleman and a man of honour he would keep his word. He further requested that they would make what inquiries they pleased respecting his previous life, as he was fully convinced they would not hear one word really adverse to him.

All this was said so frankly, and with so much appearance of truth in his manner, that Mrs. Watkins agreed to reconsider the matter, and Thornbury passed a far more happy evening with her and her daughter than might have been expected from the commencement of their conversation. To make a long story short, Mrs. Watkins, having a relative residing about ten miles from the Red House, entrusted to him the somewhat delicate task of making the necessary inquiries respecting the previous behaviour of Mr. Thornbury. In due time she received a

very satisfactory answer, and then gave her permission for the marriage. Mrs. Watkins, not wishing to reside longer in the town which her daughter was on the point of leaving, resolved to sell her business, and to take up her residence with the relative to whom she had entrusted the task of making inquiries into Mr. Thornbury's character. To his house she accordingly removed with her daughter and Deborah, who were to reside with her till the wedding-day. In the meantime Mr. Thornbury returned to the Red House, to make what preparations were necessary for the reception of his bride.

About two months after Mrs. Watkins had given her consent to the match, the young couple were married. All passed off in the most satisfactory manner, with the exception of some little sorrow on the part of Mrs. Watkins and Deborah at seeing Charity in a bridal costume, so contrary to their ideas of becoming and modest dress. But this again was modified by a promise on Charity's part that as soon as she and her husband had arrived at the Red House she would return, as far as she could, to the style of dress she had hitherto been accustomed to

wear. The ceremony over, the bride and bridegroom started off on their wedding tour, and at the end of the honeymoon they took up their abode at the Red House.

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE DIFFERENCES SETTLED, AND DIFFICULTIES
OVERCOME.

RETURNED from her wedding trip, Mrs. Thornbury entered on her duties as mistress of the Red House with zeal and alacrity. Naturally quiet and amiable in her manners, she possessed at the same time a certain determination of character, and she soon brought the somewhat indifferently trained servants into a state of excellent organization. In this the methodical Quaker habits of her previous life considerably aided her. An addition was also made to the staff of servants in the person of Deborah, who entered into Mrs. Thornbury's service as a sort of upper servant or housekeeper. As to dress, Mrs. Thornbury, to please her husband and meet her own taste as well, adopted a costume partly that of the Quakers and partly that

of ladies in general. Although Mrs. Thornbury wished Deborah to follow her example, so far at least as to reduce somewhat the starched primness of her attire, it was without avail. Deborah resolved to wear the costume she had been used to, and no argument or entreaty her mistress used could induce her to alter her determination. At last Mr. Thornbury and his wife yielded to her whim, rightly considering it impolitic to risk losing so valuable a servant by insisting on a trifle of the kind.

During the first year of Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury's married life everything passed off in a most satisfactory manner—indeed, it would have been difficult to have found a happier couple. True, they had but few acquaintances, and still fewer friends. The gentry in their neighbourhood were extremely aristocratical in their ideas, and strictly attached to the Established Church, and it having become known that Mrs. Thornbury was a Nonconformist, and had formerly been something very like an assistant in the shop of a small Yorkshire linen-draper, a strong prejudice sprang up against her, and her society was but little sought for.

This, however, gave the worthy couple no uneasiness; they had a little world of their own, and cared nothing for the opinion of strangers.

The second year after their marriage, Mrs. Thornbury gave promise of becoming a mother. If her satisfaction at the prospect was great, it was trifling compared with that felt by her husband. The idea of having an heir to his estate perfectly delighted him. In vain his wife argued that there was equal probability of the child being a girl, he had made up his mind on the subject, and he felt certain he should not be disappointed. Time, however, proved him to be in error, as his wife presented him with twins, both fine, healthy girls. He soon got over his disappointment, and was as fond and proud of his two girls as if he had had a son and heir.

Preparations had now to be made for the christening, and a great difficulty arose. Mrs. Thornbury still preserved many of her Quaker prejudices, and had a great objection to her infants being baptized according to the rites of the Church of England, and in this view she was strongly supported by her mother, Mrs.

Watkins, who had been residing in the house during her daughter's accouchement. Deborah also brought her influence to bear on the question. Mr. Thornbury, however, was determined to have his own way in the matter, and so firm was he in his resolution, that the arguments and prayers of his wife, his mother-in-law, and Deborah were as nought in the balance. Mrs. Thornbury, as in duty bound, was the first of his opponents to give way. She remembered that her husband was as strongly attached to the tenets of the Church of England as she and her mother were to those of the Quakers, and she told him that she would waive her objection and submit like a good wife to his wishes. Mrs. Watkins was far more obdurate in the matter, but at last she succumbed to a judicious compliment paid to her by her son-in-law. When the question arose as to the names to be given to the infants, he told her that he had already come to a conclusion on the subject. One was to be baptized in the name of his wife—Charity; the other in that of Mrs. Watkins—Martha. This little piece of flattery completely did away with the objection the old

lady had to the christening, and Deborah, finding it was utterly useless for her to interfere longer, made no further remarks on the subject.

Mr. Thornbury fancied that as he had now proved he would have his own way in the matter of the christening, all would pass off smoothly. But he was terribly in error. Without consulting his wife on the subject, and with the idea of affording her a pleasing surprise as a reward for her dutiful behaviour, he had written to the proprietors of a well-known baby-linen warehouse in London to send him down a handsome *layette* for twins, such as would do honour to an occasion of the kind. In due time a very respectable middle-aged woman arrived at the Red House with a choice assortment of articles used on occasions of the kind. Mr. Thornbury, with some little feeling of pride, introduced this agent of the firm into the room where sat his wife, who was now sufficiently recovered to leave her bed; and he himself stood by while the wares were being displayed. To his astonishment he could not detect in the expression of his wife's countenance the slightest appearance of pleasure or satisfaction;

while on the brow of Mrs. Watkins he perceived an ominous gloomy frown. The agent proceeded to unpack article after article, each to the ordinary female mind prettier than the former, but without eliciting from mother or daughter one expression of commendation. At last Mrs. Thornbury turned away her head, and the spirit then moved Mrs. Watkins to speak. She said, with marked disapprobation in her tone and manner, that her daughter at that moment was too much indisposed to be troubled with vanities of the kind, and requested that they might immediately be taken away. Mrs. Thornbury, although she said nothing, evidently concurred in her mother's remark; and the poor agent, not knowing what to do, looked up into Mr. Thornbury's face for her instructions. Annoyed at what he considered the ingratitude of his wife, he motioned to the agent to take the things away, and followed her out of the room, inwardly abusing mothers-in-law in general, and his own in particular, as he attributed solely to her influence the behaviour of his wife.

On the morrow, when Mr. Thornbury paid his wife a visit, the subject was again opened

by Mrs. Watkins. She informed him that Mrs. Thornbury had commissioned her to explain to him how sorely it grieved her to object to anything he proposed, it being the bounden duty of wives to submit themselves to their husbands in all things not touching their spiritual welfare. Her daughter had always been instructed in those principles by her, and she was certain they were as dear to her as life itself. But, she went on to say, her duty to her Maker was also to be taken into consideration, and she (Mrs. Watkins) was under the firm impression that by adorning her infants in such vain dresses she was placing snares for their souls while they were yet on the very threshold of existence. In conclusion, she sincerely trusted that Mr. Thornbury would, on reflection, submit to the wishes of his wife ; and that he would see that the caps and robes provided for the infants were little better than "vain trappings," and as such would not again wound his wife's feelings by offering them to her notice. Mrs. Thornbury's countenance appeared only to reflect the expression of her mother's, and, although she said nothing, her husband had no difficulty in perceiving that

she had also definitely made up her mind on the subject, and had no intention of altering it. Wisely thinking it would be useless as well as derogatory for him to have a dispute with his wife, much as he objected to the course she had taken, Mr. Thornbury turned on his heel, and left the field in the possession of his opponents. He was annoyed and crestfallen ; for he felt he was no longer master in his own house. With an abashed countenance he presented himself before the agent from the baby-linen warehouse, and informed her that his wife declined purchasing any of her wares. He greatly regretted the trouble he had given her, but he had no alternative in the matter. He was, however, perfectly willing not only to reimburse all her expenses, but to make her any reasonable allowance for the inconvenience she or her employers had been put to. The agent seemed hardly to understand him.

"You surely do not believe, sir, that your good lady does not wish to have the christening robes?"

"Such is the truth, however," said Mr. Thornbury, sorrowfully.

"Oh! sir, I am sure you must be mistaken."

"I most sincerely wish you could prove it to me. You would do me a singular favour, I assure you," said Mr. Thornbury, devoutly wishing to have his revenge on his mother-in-law, to whom he attributed his wife's opposition.

"I could easily do so, if you wish, sir; but you must give me full powers to act as I please. I am certain I should succeed. I know a great deal more about young mothers than you do, although, I dare say, you are wiser in most things than I am."

"You have full power to do what you please," said Mr. Thornbury, "and I wish you success, although I greatly doubt it."

"You have no occasion, sir, I assure you. If you could only get the old lady out of the way for an hour or so, to take a walk or anything else, by the time you come back you will find your good lady has quite changed her mind."

"I will get her away if it is at all possible," said Mr. Thornbury, in a very determined manner.

Mr. Thornbury, shortly after this conversation, met his mother-in-law at the lunch-table. She seemed at first rather in doubt as to the reception he would give her, and she eyed him attentively for some moments. She soon perceived she had no cause for any anxiety—nothing could be more cordial than his manner to her. She was greatly pleased at the evident docility of his character, as it was another proof to her of the superiority of the female mind.

During lunch, the pair conversed pleasantly on many subjects, without the slightest difference of opinion arising between them. When the meal was nearly over, Mr. Thornbury asked his mother-in-law whether she had anything particular to occupy her time that afternoon, as he would like to consult her about some alterations he intended making in the grounds; and which he wished finished soon, so as to be a surprise to his wife on her recovery.

Mrs. Watkins was pleased with her son-in-law's amiability, and said she would be delighted to go with him. Mr. Thornbury, of course, skilfully contrived so to engage the old lady as to give the agent plenty of time; and, on re-

turning, he seated himself in the library, and waited somewhat impatiently for a report of what had taken place during his absence. At last the agent made her appearance, but as one of the female servants was near, she merely said in a low tone of voice,

“It is all right, sir; the babies, as I promised you, will wear the robes at the christening.”

The plan adopted by the agent was simply this: as soon as she had satisfied herself that Mrs. Watkins had left the house she took the opportunity of enlisting the monthly nurse in her service. The latter persuaded Mrs. Thornbury that as she looked somewhat fatigued she had better take a nap, and that she might not be disturbed by the infants they were removed into the next room, which had been fitted up as a temporary nursery, proposing that Deborah should remain with her mistress the while. This having been agreed to, the agent and the nurse took the opportunity to dress the two infants in the christening robes, and that being accomplished they quietly waited till Mrs. Thornbury should awake. In the course of half-an-hour Deborah, without entering the nursery, told

them that her mistress was no longer asleep, and that they could bring the babies back again as soon as they pleased. In a few minutes the nurse and the agent, each armed with a baby splendidly attired, entered Mrs. Thornbury's bedroom.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said the latter ; "but as I intend leaving for London to-night, I thought you might like to see how the babies would have looked in their robes."

"Two more beautiful little angels I never saw in my life," put in the monthly nurse. "They really do one's heart good to look at them."

Mrs. Thornbury cast the loving glance of a proud young mother upon them, but, partially recovering herself, she attempted to turn her eyes from them dressed as they were, but it was impossible, and she submitted to the temptation. The woman and the nurse now approached her, so as to allow her to inspect the children's dresses more closely. The more narrowly Mrs. Thornbury looked at the twins the prouder she was of them. There was a strong excuse for her in thus swerving from the deter-

mination she had arrived at in the morning—the children's robes were perfect miracles of artistic needlework. Over white silk slips they wore long robes of the finest cambric, richly embroidered with lovely lace insertions. Their caps were of white embroidered silk, trimmed profusely with the richest Mechlin lace. Altogether their appearance was so overwhelmingly attractive that, had either Mrs. George Fox or Mrs. William Penn been present in the flesh, their hearts must have melted within them, and they would have freely acknowledged that the temptation was too great for any mortal mother to withstand. Even Deborah gave way, and admitted that the infants were indeed lovely.

Mrs. Thornbury now began to examine the work in the infants' dresses minutely, her pre-nuptial occupations having probably made her critical in productions of the kind. When she had finished her inspection she said to the agent,

“When do you propose leaving for London?”

“By the night coach, ma'am,” was the reply.

“If you have no objection, I would prefer your remaining here till to-morrow.”

"Certainly, ma'am, if you wish it. It will make no difference to me."

"Then pray remain," said Mrs. Thornbury.

In the evening, as Mr. Thornbury was on the point of retiring to rest, he received a message from his wife, informing him that she wanted to speak to him. He immediately obeyed the summons.

"I am afraid, my dear," she said to him, "I was undutiful to you this morning; pray forgive me. I have thought better of your kindness since, and I particularly wish the children to wear the dresses you have provided for them."

Thornbury kissed his wife, and promised that it should be as she wished.

The next day was appointed for the christening, but Mrs. Thornbury had not informed her mother of the change in her determination, considering, perhaps wisely, that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. It was only when all was in readiness for them to start for the church, that Mrs. Watkins perceived that her daughter had obeyed her husband's wishes. She cast an indignant glance, first at him and then at the children.

"What would George Fox have said?" she exclaimed.

"George Fox be hanged!" remarked Mr. Thornbury, indignantly.

Mrs. Watkins could not by her presence sanction such irreverence. She rushed hurriedly away, and shut herself into her room for the rest of the day. The christening party now started for the church, where the infants were baptized in the names of Charity and Martha, the latter being appropriated to our heroine. The next morning Mrs. Watkins left for home, and, to the great sorrow of her daughter, still unappeased. To do Mr. Thornbury justice, he submitted to his mother-in-law's departure with far greater resignation than his wife.

Two years after the birth of the twins, Mrs. Thornbury was again confined, and this time, to the great joy of both parents, of a boy. He received the name of Edgar, after his father. They had anticipated some little difficulty on the occasion with Mrs. Watkins, fearing she would again object to the christening robe. Fortunately, however, for Mr. Thornbury and his wife, the old lady at the time was suffering

from rheumatism, and she feared leaving home, so all passed off pleasantly enough at the Red House. For five years after this Mrs. Thornbury had no further addition to her family, but in the sixth she was again expecting to be a mother. Mrs. Thornbury wrote to Mrs. Watkins, inviting her to be present at the accouchement. Beyond the invitation, the letter contained a most grateful compliment to the old lady. It stated that should her health not be sufficiently strong to allow her to leave the house, they would both feel obliged by her informing them, in case the child should be a boy, whether she would prefer his being called George Fox or William Penn, as Mr. Thornbury had decided on one or the other of these names. The old lady was so pleased at this delicate attention to her feelings, that she immediately left home to take up her residence for a time at the Red House. Luckily the child was a boy, and at his baptism he was registered, "George Fox Thornbury," which so delighted Mrs. Watkins that she made no objection whatever to the splendour of the dress he wore on the occasion.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury were certainly blessed

in their offspring, for a finer or healthier little family it would have been difficult to find. After Mrs. Thornbury herself, whose attention to her children was unremitting, the greater portion of the credit was due to Deborah, who had relinquished her duties as housekeeper to perform those of head-nurse. Deborah's affection for the children was scarcely less than Mrs. Thornbury's; in fact, had they been her own she could hardly have shown greater solicitude for them, and they in return did ample justice to her judicious nursing. As the twins grey up, a marked difference developed itself both in their personal appearance and in their character. Both were well made and healthy, intelligent and amiable, but there all similarity stopped. Charity was exceedingly pretty, had a fair complexion, bright blue eyes, and auburn hair; in fact, her countenance would have formed an admirable model for a painter who wished to combine in the expression of the same face love, amiability of temper, and mirth. Martha, on the contrary, was dark in complexion, had black, thoughtful eyes, and raven hair: her features were regular, but with little to attract in them.

There was, however, an interesting expression in her face, which went far to compensate for her lack of beauty. Her best feature was her mouth, which, especially when she smiled, imparted to the face an expression that had something extremely engaging in it.

The expression of countenance in the two girls was a faithful index to their minds and characters. Charity was a light-hearted, sweet-tempered, laughter-loving little romp. Martha rarely smiled, had but little pleasure in their childish games, and when she did take part in them, it was easy to perceive that she did so rather to please her sister than from any satisfaction of her own. But notwithstanding the difference between them in disposition and temperament, they had a remarkable affection for each other—each, however, showing it in her peculiar way. Charity, extreme in all things, would have given all she possessed in the world to her sister, if she had thought it would have pleased her; while Martha, scarcely less generous in the matter of giving, had much more discretion, and was, even at eight years of age, the prudential adviser of Charity. She would re-

monstrate with her gravely on her habitual thoughtlessness, and yet would screen and assist her when she was in any trouble occasioned by her romps. She would arrange for her whatever little irregularities they might have occasioned in her dress, so as to hide them as much as possible from the scrutiny of Mrs. Thornbury or Deborah, both of whom retained to a great degree their original Quaker-like love of neatness. When Charity was in disgrace from any little accident, Martha would plead her cause with great energy, and would wipe away her tears when she was subjected to any trifling punishment or scolding.

Her brother Edgar also came in for no small portion of Martha's matronly supervision and advice. She watched over him with the greatest solicitude, keeping him as much as possible out of mischief, for which, child as he was, he showed considerable aptitude. She tried as far as she could to neutralise the baneful influence Charity, with her love of romping, was likely to exercise over him. Although there is little reason to doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury held the two girls in equal affection, and pos-

sibly would have revolted at the idea that both were not equally dear to them, there was no difficulty in perceiving that Martha, with her gentle manners and well-regulated mind, was uppermost in her mother's thoughts, while the father made a very idol of Charity, and by his over-indulgence increased the natural buoyancy and thoughtlessness of her disposition.

As they grew older, the same characteristics were observable in the children; but all went on as happily as possible for the next five years. The same strong attachment continued to exist between the sisters. Charity's habitual carelessness did not diminish as she grew older, while Martha became still more sedate and methodical. She was altogether a singular character. Although exceedingly undemonstrative, she was the very embodiment of latent family affection. This would occasionally develop itself without any apparent reason for its sudden outflow; whilst at other times, when it might naturally have been expected to show itself, it seemed to be almost dormant. In this respect she formed a singular contrast to Charity, whose love, always buoyant, showed

itself when any especial occasion called for it, such as an act of unexpected kindness on the part of her father, or any just commendation from her mother, while Martha would allow similar occasions to pass without much more notice than the thanks which were due. At other times, again, the marks of her love would show themselves without any particular cause being apparent to elicit them. For example, she would occasionally stand by her mother's chair, while some topic that was totally uninteresting to her was the subject of conversation, and to which she appeared to pay not the slightest attention, when suddenly, and without warning, she would throw her arms round Mrs. Thornbury's neck and kiss her affectionately. Then she would relieve herself from the embrace, and resume her original position by her mother's side, wearing on her countenance the same placid thoughtful expression which she had worn before the ebullition of affection, or possibly after a few moments she would leave the room on some errand of her own. In the evening, when the family party had assembled round the fire, Martha would frequently seat

herself on a stool by her father's side, and while he was conversing on subjects totally unconnected with her, she would take hold of his hand and retain it for awhile, without uttering a word or paying the slightest attention to the topic which was occupying the others.

She was also exceedingly fond of her brother Edgar, although he was in the habit of making poor Martha the butt of his boyish pranks and jokes. She submitted with the greatest equanimity, and possibly admired him the more for the very tricks he played upon her. The only individual to whom she was at all demonstrative was her little brother George, now a singularly beautiful child, in feature closely resembling Charity, although in his face there was something of the mildness and intelligence of her own expression. Martha had taken George under her especial protection, and the child in return was exceedingly fond of her. She had also constituted herself his instructress, and had taught him his letters and his childish prayers, and his efficiency in both was a source of great gratification to her.

But if any doubt could have existed in the

minds of Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury of the love Martha felt for her little brother, a lamentable circumstance which took place when she was between twelve and thirteen years of age elicited it to such a degree as must have completely undeceived them. Martha had been ailing for some days. She was suffering from prostration of strength and loss of appetite, with occasional fits of cold shivering alternating with flushes of burning heat. She, however, complained very little, and in consequence her malady did not receive the attention it really required. Notwithstanding the state of her health, she continued her attentions and instructions to her little brother George, hearing him his lessons in the day-time, and especially attending to his prayers night and morning. The child seemed also to be rather unwell. His appetite had fallen off, and he was far paler than usual, but, like Martha, he made scarcely any complaints, and Mrs. Thornbury, whose attention had been called to him, fancied that it was only some childish indisposition, which a slight dose of ordinary domestic medicine would speedily cure. One evening, after he had been

prepared for bed, Martha attended as usual to hear him say his prayers. He repeated after her those he had been accustomed to use, till he came to a verse of a hymn which he was able to recite without her aid :—

“ Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child ;
Pity my simplicity,
And teach me, Lord, to come to Thee.”

There was something at the moment exceedingly beautiful in the child's appearance, as in his white bed-gown he knelt before Martha, his glossy silken auburn locks, in which she took especial pride, falling on his neck from beneath his little cap, his hands pressed together, and his eyes bent reverently on the ground. Martha thought at the time that he strongly resembled an angel. When his prayer was over, Deborah placed him in his cot. “ Sit by me, Martha,” he said. She was about to obey him, but Deborah, noticing the girl's sickly look, interposed, and insisted on her leaving him and going to her bed. After some little demur, Martha kissed him and left the room—and she never saw him afterwards.

The next morning Martha was too unwell to

rise from her bed, and a medical man was sent for. As soon as he saw her, he unhesitatingly pronounced her to be in a high fever, and that every precaution would need to be taken, or it might terminate in typhus. He also saw little George, who, although at the moment he showed no such symptoms as to excite alarm, was still far from well, and required great attention. He further advised that, if practicable, Charity and Edgar should immediately be sent away, as it was possible the malady might communicate itself to them also. This advice was immediately acted upon. Mr. Thornbury applied to one of his tenants to receive the two healthy children into his house for a few weeks. His request was immediately acceded to, and Edgar and Charity left home that night. As the doctor had feared, Martha's malady terminated in typhus, and that in its most severe form. Delirium set in, and the disease ran its usual course. Thanks to skilful medical treatment, the excellent nursing of Mrs. Thornbury and Deborah, and a good constitution, the fever at last subsided, leaving its victim sadly enfeebled by the violence of its attack.

When Martha had fully recovered her senses, she naturally became anxious about the health of the other members of the family, particularly of her little brother George. An evasive answer was given her, but she did not detect the ambiguity it contained. Two days afterwards, in the presence of her mother and Deborah, she again inquired after the child. Mrs. Thornbury attempted to answer her, but in vain, and, instead, she burst into a flood of tears. Deborah then took upon herself the painful task of explaining to Martha that little George was dead. "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord," she said. "He hath in His mercy spared thee, my dear, but thy little brother is now one of His angels." Martha received the intelligence in her usual placid, undemonstrative manner. She merely bent her head forward from her pillow, as if in acquiescence to the Almighty's will, but uttered not a word. She remained perfectly still for a few moments, and then gently turned her head on the pillow, as if to sleep. Her mother, surprised at her conduct, thought she could hardly have under-

stood Deborah's meaning, and she resolved on the first favourable opportunity to tell Martha herself of the death of her brother. After a few moments' silence, so as not to disturb Martha if she felt an inclination to sleep, Mrs. Thornbury noticed a slight heaving of the bed-clothes which covered Martha's shoulder, and she went softly round to the other side of the bed to ascertain the cause. To her great surprise, she found that the poor girl, though perfectly silent, was weeping bitterly. Her tears flowed so rapidly that Mrs. Thornbury became greatly alarmed. The poor child's sorrow, however, though it seemed perfectly overwhelming, was displaying itself in her own peculiar way. Her grief was perfectly silent; she did not utter a sob, and, but for the slight involuntary movement of the shoulders, she might have been supposed to be in a profound sleep.

Mrs. Thornbury now used every effort in her power to console the poor girl, but with small success. True, to a certain extent she somewhat suppressed her tears, but the effort was evidently made with the intention of pleasing her mother more than anything else. Fortu-

nately, beyond somewhat retarding her cure, Martha's grief did not greatly injure her bodily health, but the doctor began to entertain some fears whether it might not act prejudicially on her mind. As soon as Martha had acquired sufficient strength to be removed, he advised Mrs. Thornbury to take her to the sea-side. This was readily agreed to. Mrs. Thornbury and Martha left home, and returned in about a month, the patient having received great benefit from the trip.

Martha never afterwards spoke of her little brother, and the rest of the family, to humour her, abstained from mentioning him in her presence. A slight difficulty relating to the poor boy had yet to be got over, and Mrs. Thornbury was sorely puzzled how to accomplish it. Before George was buried several locks of his hair had been cut off, and one had been given to each member of the family with the exception of Martha, though hers had been retained for her. Mrs. Thornbury now wished her to receive it, but did not like to broach the subject. Charity, however, came to her mother's assistance in this matter. She enveloped the lock of hair in a

sheet of notepaper, on which she wrote, "A lock of poor George's hair," and she then placed it in a drawer in Martha's room. Shortly afterwards Charity asked her sister for something she knew was in the drawer, and Martha left the room in which they were sitting to find it. Charity went again to the drawer in Martha's bedroom. The lock of hair had been taken by Martha, but she spoke not one word about it, nor could anyone discover what she had done with it.

CHAPTER V.

THE EAST PENTALLECK TIN MINE.

DURING the next few years nothing particularly worthy of notice occurred in the Thornbury family. The twins grew up fine, healthy, intelligent girls. Charity possibly became somewhat less volatile, but Martha continued the same thoughtful, sedate creature we left her in the last chapter. Charity seemed to increase in beauty daily, and promised to be a most lovely woman. Martha's personal attractions, on the contrary, did not improve as she grew older, although she was by no means ill-favoured. Like Charity, she was tall and well made, but perhaps just a little too slim in figure. Not only did the sisters entertain towards each other an ardent affection, but there was between them unlimited confidence, not a thought or a

wish of the one being unknown to the other. For the rest, they were dutiful and loving, neither of them probably having ever given their parents a moment's uneasiness or anxiety, apart from their bodily health; and that, since Martha's fever, had generally been most satisfactory.

Little mention has hitherto been made of Edgar, the son and heir. This, however, is not because he will not hold a prominent place in our narrative, but rather because there has hardly been anything in his career different from the ordinary run of boys of his own age. He was tolerably good-looking, well made, and, though somewhat irascible, far from being ill-tempered. He had a fair amount of ability, and was generous, affectionate, and resolute. He bore great love not only for his parents, but for his sisters also. Although, possibly, he teased Martha more than he did Charity, and made the latter more his confidant, it would be unjust to say that his love was greater for the one than the other. Both the girls, in return, held him in high admiration and affection. Like his father, he had a great love for field sports, and before he was fourteen years of age he was not

only a good and bold rider, but also a fair shot.

With the exception of Edgar's two years' residence at a boarding-school a few miles distant from the Red House, Mrs. Thornbury had hitherto been the sole instructress of her children. Though without what are generally termed accomplishments, like most Quakeresses she had received the elements of a good sound English education, and she found a pleasure in imparting instruction to her children. The question of economy, it must be admitted, was also somewhat mixed up in it. Her husband's income, though ample for their wants while the children were young, would hardly be sufficient when they grew older. Again, she was well aware that, although she was quite able to instruct her children up to a certain point, she could not go far beyond it, either with advantage to them or satisfaction to herself. It had therefore been determined on that when the twins had reached their fifteenth year they should be sent to a first-rate finishing-school in London for a short period, that they might have the benefit of the best masters in every branch of female education. This, of course, would entail increased

expenditure, and this again would be augmented by the project Mr. Thornbury had formed of sending Edgar to Eton. To carry out both schemes would need, at the lowest computation, an additional outlay of at least five hundred pounds a year, and as Mr. Thornbury's income had never exceeded a thousand, his wife had reasonably considered that, by economising a little beforehand, the increase of expenditure would not be so much felt.

But notwithstanding all Mrs. Thornbury's foresight, she had missed one element out of her calculations. True, in the education of her children she had practised great economy; but in the same proportion that she had saved her husband had spent. He had never exceeded his income, but he had lived fully up to it, for though he had only one hobby, it was a most expensive one. He was passionately fond of hunting, and he spent more in horseflesh than he told his wife, so that when the time arrived when the twins should be sent to London, and Edgar to Eton, Mr. Thornbury, instead of having the necessary funds in hand, had not more than the balance of his last half-year's rents, and

a portion of the last dividend arising from the money he had in the government securities. Of this, however, he did not inform his wife, and when her children were leaving her, she was under the pleasing but false impression that, through her good management, the expense of finishing their education was already amply provided for.

After the children had been half a year at school, Mr. Thornbury left the Red House to bring them home for the vacation. A short time after their arrival, the bills for their schooling were sent in. The amounts of these were greater than Mr. Thornbury had anticipated, and they caused him considerable anxiety. By selling out some of the money he had in the funds he certainly would be able to meet them without difficulty, but then how could he provide for future claims that would be made on him? He saw that there were but two alternatives: either to reduce his domestic expenditure, or to hit upon some means of making money. The first would be so exceedingly painful to his pride, that he at once refused to entertain it. It must be admitted that a considerable amount

of personal selfishness entered into his decision. It would have been difficult for him to have economised his household expenses, and at the same time to have lived in a style at all consistent with the position he held in society, so moderate, without being in the slightest degree niggardly, had been his wife's management. The only other way open to him was to have retrenched his hunting expenditure. Had he done this—sold one of his horses, and dismissed a groom—he would have saved not only sufficient to have paid his children's schooling, but have had money in pocket as well. This, however, he could not think of doing, and it now remained for him to find some plan by which he could increase his income. Trade, of course, he never thought of. In those days, any mercantile transactions, save those of the very highest order, were deemed beneath the dignity of those who are now called country gentlemen of the good old school; and Mr. Thornbury was as prejudiced on the subject as his fellows, although he had married the daughter of a small Doncaster shopkeeper. At last he resolved that when he returned with his children to London

after their holidays, he should sell out sufficient stock to pay their half-year's school bills, and at the same time hold a consultation with his stockbroker as to the best means he could adopt to increase his income.

When the time came, however, his stockbroker was out of London, and the person who transacted the business for him being a stranger, Mr. Thornbury did not like to ask his advice on the subject. But chance threw in his way, when he least expected it, a good authority on the subject. He had taken up his quarters at the Golden Cross Hotel, and one evening, in the coffee-room, he formed the acquaintance of a gentleman whose appearance and manners pleased him exceedingly. In the course of conversation he informed Mr. Thornbury that he resided in Cornwall, where he was largely interested in mining operations, in which subject he seemed in fact to be particularly well versed. Mr. Thornbury at last became much interested in the details he heard, and many were the questions he put concerning them. He was, above all, struck with the enormous profits many of the mines yielded, and he readily admitted the truth of

the argument, that if these were so remunerative, there was no possible reason why others might not be equally so. The conversation ended by the gentleman giving Mr. Thornbury his card, on which he wrote the name and address of a mining agent in the City, on whom full reliance might be placed. "He is an honourable and energetic young fellow," he said, "just commencing business, and well up in mining transactions. I am sure he will not allow you to be imposed upon by any one if you think of investing in mines, and I assure you it requires a good deal of caution and experience to detect what are good and what are bad speculations."

That night Mr. Thornbury slept little, his imagination being active upon the wonderful tales of brilliant fortunes made by mining, which he had heard in the coffee-room of the hotel. Immediately after breakfast next morning, he started off to the City, to see the mining agent to whom he had been recommended. In fact, so early was it when he arrived, that he had anticipated the agent by more than half an hour. The short time before the latter's ar-

rival, Mr. Thornbury spent in looking round the office. There was but little in it to attract or interest the unprofessional observer. A desk, two stools, and a long counter, were the only pieces of furniture it contained. On the counter were placed as many specimens of minerals as would have furnished a tolerably large geological museum, and under these again, others were ranged on the floor, very large and very heavy. Of the value of these specimens, of course, Mr. Thornbury was profoundly ignorant ; but they served to convey the impression to his mind that the agent was a man of experience and ability, and well versed in the art and mystery of mining. When the agent arrived, Mr. Thornbury presented the card he had received from the stranger in the coffee-room, and he then briefly explained to him the object of his visit.

“I shall be very happy to give you any information in my power,” said Mr. Morris, “and also to assist you in every way I can. Without self-laudation, I think I may say that I am as well acquainted with Cornwall and its mining operations as most men.”

Mr. Thornbury immediately asked whether different mines, that had been spoken of on the previous evening, yielded such immense profits, and whether it would be possible for him to invest some money in them with advantage?

“Nothing can be truer than the account you have heard,” said Mr. Morris, “and you can invest in those mines if you please, but, at the same time, remember that their shares are at an enormous premium, and therefore whether you can do so advantageously is another affair. I should rather say you could not, although by telling you so I am acting against my own personal interests. Money and money’s worth are as well understood in Cornwall as in any part of the United Kingdom, and the men of Cornwall, as a rule, are as little disposed to part with a thing under its real value as any class of the population, take them from what part you may. The dividends of these mines, you must remember, are calculated on the original price of the shares, not the prices you can at present purchase them at. Now I will tell you what I would advise you to do, if you intend speculating in mines; and that is, to

join a substantial respectable party of gentlemen in opening a new one."

"But I am totally unacquainted with a single person holding mining shares," said Mr. Thornbury, "and of course I should not like mixing myself up with a party of strangers."

"Very likely not," was the reply; "and I commend your prudence; at the same time, if you wish it, I could introduce you to some gentlemen with whom neither you nor any person living need object to act. There is, for example, a mine which it is contemplated opening, and one which promises most profitable results to the adventurers. In fact, I am at present organizing the company."

"Would it be an indiscretion on my part," said Mr. Thornbury, "if I were to ask the particulars?"

"Indiscretion to ask it! Certainly not, my dear sir," said Mr. Morris. "At the same time, I hardly know whether I am at liberty to inform you who are the gentlemen engaged in the enterprise." Then, after a few moments' consideration, he continued: "After all, I do not see that there can possibly be any objection, as

the number of shareholders is not yet complete. The mine I allude to is a tin mine. It is proposed that only twelve adventurers should be admitted into the concern, and at present there are only ten who have enrolled their names, although several others are nibbling at it; so I think it is not improbable you may have as good a chance of taking one of the vacant shares as any of the others who have not yet fully made up their minds. At any rate, I will bring the question of your joining the company before them at their next meeting, if you wish it."

"And those who have already joined it are all respectable and responsible men?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"Highly so," was the reply. "I might say, without the slightest exaggeration, there is not a man worth less than thirty thousand pounds among them."

"What capital would you require?"

"They propose that each shareholder should be prepared, in case of need, to advance as much as one thousand pounds, but it is more than probable not one half of the money would be

required. Each proprietor would then have nominally one hundred shares allotted to him, and as the mine prospers these will naturally rise to a premium. Even with moderate success, nothing is more probable than that, at the end of two years, the sale of ten of your one hundred shares would more than recoup you for the advance you have made, and you would thus have the remaining ninety shares without their having cost you one shilling."

"But if anything should go wrong, would not the liabilities be very great?"

"The mine will be worked on the cost-book principle, by which every shareholder's liability is limited to the amount of the shares he holds."

"But is that really a fact?" inquired Mr. Thornbury. "I have heard that in mining concerns the liability is unlimited; but I must admit that my knowledge of the subject is of the most limited description."

"By the cost-book principle, I can assure you that you are strictly limited to the amount of your shares. I know perfectly well that this view of the subject has been disputed, but I can

show you the opinion I have lately received from an eminent barrister well versed in the laws relating to mines, and he appears to have no doubt about the matter."

"Where is the mine situated?"

"About twelve miles from Truro, in the heart of the mining district. Labour is abundant in the neighbourhood, and access easy."

"What is the name of the mine?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"The East Pentalleck Tin Mine."

"What is the amount of the purchase money to be paid to the present proprietors?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply, "You will have to pay a royalty on all the tin it yields."

"Then there is no outlay for the purchase or the lease at the commencement," said Mr. Thornbury, evidently with much interest.

"Not one shilling," said Mr. Morris. "As I said before, you will merely have to pay a royalty, and a very moderate one, on the yield."

Mr. Thornbury was now silent for some moments, evidently deeply absorbed in thought.

He then inquired what was the quantity as well as the quality of the tin found in the mine.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Morris, "pray do not deceive yourself on the subject. At present there is neither a mine, nor the appearance of one, more than on the floor we are standing on; the locality has simply the appearance of a barren moor. Not a spade has yet been placed in it."

"How do you know it contains tin, then?"

"We are almost certain of its existence from the fact that on all sides of the spot we have chosen are mines at present in full work, yielding large profits to the owners, and the probabilities are a thousand to one that some of the same veins must pass through our property."

"But is that opinion based upon good authority?" said Mr. Thornbury.

"On the highest authority, I can assure you. I will give you a proof. The person we have engaged as captain of the mine is one of the most experienced men in all Cornwall. There is a joke extant about him (though, by-the-bye, I am not so sure that it is a mere joke after all),

that he was born underground, and has lived there three parts of his life. When Mr. Tredegar, for that is his name, received our proposition to put him at the head of a mine we intended opening, at first he agreed to the terms readily enough, but when he heard where the mine was situated, he positively refused to accept the appointment, unless he was allowed to take a twelfth share in it himself."

"But," inquired Mr. Thornbury, "did he expect to receive it as a gratuity?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Morris, "he was to pay for it equally with the other shareholders. Some of the other shareholders demurred greatly to the proposition, and one of them offered to double his stake in the concern if Mr. Tredegar was not allowed to be a partner; but as the latter was imperative, and we could not do very well without him, we were obliged to submit to his terms."

"I think," said Mr. Thornbury, "it would have been very impolitic to have refused him."

"And I entirely agree with you," said Mr. Morris; "though some of the rest thought otherwise: holding that Tredegar, if he became

a shareholder, would then at the same time be both a master and a servant. But it is now settled that he shall be allowed to take a twelfth share, and I have no doubt all will go on amicably for the future."

"Should I feel disposed to join the concern," said Mr. Thornbury, "how soon would you require my definite answer?"

"In the first place," said Mr. Morris, "I am not prepared to say there will be a share at your disposal. But at the next meeting of the shareholders, which will take place in a few days, I will bring the subject before them, if you wish it. At the same time, remember I told you that there were several persons inclined to take shares who have not definitely made up their minds. Of this I am sure, however, that if no personal friend of the present shareholders applies for the disposable shares, they will be allotted to those strangers who first apply for them. If you wish to join us, the sooner you send in a written application for a share, together with a cheque for £200, the amount of the first call, the greater will be the probability of your success."

So anxious was Mr. Thornbury to secure a share in the East Pentalleck Tin Mine, that he spent very little time in making inquiries respecting the character of the agent. Indeed, he had some little difficulty in finding anyone acquainted with Mr. Morris; and when at last he succeeded, the information he obtained respecting him was almost wholly of a negative description. Mr. Thornbury's authority had never heard anything said against Mr. Morris. He knew very little about him, but he seemed a very pushing, energetic young man—one who was determined to make his way in the world. He (the authority) did not believe, from what he had seen of him, that he would in any way lend his name to a dishonest transaction.

Scanty and negative as all this was, it was considered perfectly satisfactory by Mr. Thornbury, and he immediately sold out sufficient stock to pay the first call. Next day he called upon Mr. Morris with a cheque; and, after having filled up a form of application, he asked if it were likely he should obtain the share he was applying for? To his great satisfaction, he was informed by the agent that there was every

prospect of his having the share allotted to him, as there were two shares still unappropriated, and only two applicants for them, so that they might have one each, always supposing that no personal friends of the present shareholders were desirous of taking them. The shareholders, Mr. Morris continued, were to meet next day, and the day afterwards Mr. Thornbury would certainly receive an answer to his application ; and he (Mr. Morris) had no doubt it would be a favourable one. Two days afterwards, Mr. Thornbury received a note from the agent, informing him that he had been allotted one of the shares. All now being satisfactorily arranged, he made his preparations for leaving London and returning to the Red House.

On his arrival at home, he found a letter awaiting him, which not only caused him considerable annoyance, but necessitated his immediate return to London. It has already been stated that his farms were copyhold under the Dean and Chapter of the Diocese. They were held for three lives, and a heavy fine was imposed on either of them falling in. About two years previous one of them had fallen in ; the

finer were paid, and a young healthy life was substituted for the person deceased. Mr. Thornbury then fondly hoped that it would be many years before another change of the kind would take place; but he was doomed to be terribly disappointed. The person who had been nominated had died suddenly from an attack of apoplexy, and the letter which awaited him was from the solicitors of the Dean and Chapter, informing him of the event, and requesting that the new fine might be paid into their bankers with as little delay as possible. As there was no possibility of disputing the matter, Mr. Thornbury left home to raise the money by selling out the remainder of what he had in the funds, which would be sufficient for the purpose, and leave a balance of some hundred pounds. This he determined to place in the hands of his bankers, to be in readiness should any further calls be required for working the East Pentalleck Tin Mine.

While in London, Mr. Thornbury formed the acquaintance of his brother shareholders in the mine. They seemed a plain, straightforward, jovial set of men, and pleased him immensely;

while they, in their turn, seemed highly satisfied with their new associate. Moreover, they dined together, and drank success to their new undertaking. Mr. Thornbury took the chair on the occasion, and Mr. Morris, the agent, occupied the seat at the opposite end of the table. Mr. Thornbury, like most country gentlemen of the time, was fond of conviviality, and he was now in his glory. The guests all paid him the greatest respect, and listened with marked interest to his description of the state of agriculture in his part of the country, and of its local politics as well. They were also much pleased with the account he gave of his family, particularly the twins ; and they then and there resolved that different parts of the mine should be called by their names, and, that this might not be forgotten, Mr. Morris was requested on the spot to make a note of their wish, and to see it carried into effect. They parted at a late hour, with abundant expressions of good feeling towards each other. And the next day Mr. Thornbury returned home.

The affair of the copyholds having been completed, Mr. Thornbury now employed all his

energies in advancing the interests of the Pentalleck Tin Mine—in fact, he made it a perfect hobby. He had a copy of every dispatch sent by Mr. Tredegar, the captain, forwarded to him at the Red House; and, as chairman of the company, he punctually returned his opinion endorsed on it, for the benefit of his brother shareholders. It was true he was, in reality, profoundly ignorant on all mining affairs; but Mr. Morris had contrived to persuade him that he had a sort of natural genius for tin, and Mr. Thornbury had too great faith in the agent's integrity to doubt him. If he occasionally erred, it was not to be wondered at; even Mr. Morris himself (and that gentleman, with great modesty, admitted it) was sometimes at fault respecting the yield and requirements of the mine, although he had been brought up to the business all his life. Mr. Morris, for example, had firmly believed that the first call would have been ample for the working of the mine, as well as bringing it into full operation; but it had since appeared that much more was needed—so much, in fact, that before the works had been six months in progress, three other calls of

one hundred pounds each had been required.

The mine also (judging from the captain's reports) seemed to possess several annoying peculiarities. It was ready enough to yield, in different quantities, several other minerals, though not the particular one required. It occasionally gave cupel, quartz, pench, mundig, and even now and then a little copper, but not a single particle of tin. Immediately after a call had been paid in, the reports generally became unsatisfactory, and ran in such a strain as this:—"The ground in the shaft continues hard, and there is an increase of water; but still I am in hopes it will not increase much more. Otherwise, all going on well." When more money was required, reports were more encouraging, and great hope was held out of immediate success. "The water has now disappeared," Mr. Tredegar would then write, "and everything is going on most satisfactorily. The mine looks kindly for tin. I herewith send you the cost sheet; by it you will perceive we are four hundred pounds in debt to the bankers. I am sorry for it, but it could not be helped. I have no fear of the ultimate results, although

a little more money is now needed than was anticipated. I am certain the mine will be a success. Why should it not?" It should also be remarked that the resolution come to on the night of the dinner, respecting the naming of two of the principal parts had been faithfully carried out, and Mr. Thornbury felt quite flattered when he read such sentences in Mr. Tredegar's reports as that "Charity's shaft is now rather more than five fathom below the forty fathom;" or that "Martha's adit was being driven by two men who well understood the work." These extracts always put him in good humour to pay the next call; and that, perhaps, after all, was what Mr. Tredegar intended.

Although the willingness and regularity shown by Mr. Thornbury in paying up his calls gave him great credit with the agent and Mr. Tredegar, he became at last somewhat anxious, if not alarmed, at their frequency. But he was informed that the necessity of these calls could be accounted for in a very disagreeable way. Three of the shareholders had become defaulters, and their estates, when wound up, did not

pay one shilling in the pound to their creditors, and the remaining creditors had to submit to heavier calls in consequence. At last two other shareholders emigrated to America, leaving their last calls still unpaid. Never had Mr. Morris (and he acknowledged it too) been more deceived in his life than in the character of these men. He would have trusted them with every farthing he possessed in the world.

The water also rushed into the mine with greater violence than ever; though, at the same time, on every fresh application for money, Mr. Tredegar reported that "the mine looked kindly for tin." A drowning man proverbially catches at a straw, and in Mr. Thornbury's mining career this straw was the expression, so often repeated by the captain of the mine, that "it looked kindly for tin." Over and over again it had induced Mr. Thornbury to make a further advance, without remonstrance, in the hope that the promise thus held out would be realised. The mine, however, notwithstanding all the outlay, yielded not one ounce of tin, while its powers of absorbing gold seemed unlimited. At last, when the whole of the thousand pounds he

had subscribed for was exhausted, without the slightest return, Mr. Thornbury resolutely determined he would not advance another shilling. However, he was mistaken. The whole affair collapsed. Mr. Tredegar either absconded, or again took up his residence in some underground locality, where it was impossible to find him. After his disappearance it was discovered that, in his double capacity of master and servant, he had contrived to incur enormous liabilities on account of the mine, which Mr. Thornbury was requested to pay, his brother shareholders having been proved, to the satisfaction of the creditors, not to be worth powder and shot, or, in other words, they were not likely to pay the cost of prosecuting them. At first Mr. Thornbury obstinately refused to pay a farthing more than his own proportion of the liabilities, but proceedings at law having been taken against him, he was obliged to put the affair into the hands of his solicitor, who candidly advised him to pay the amount claimed without litigation, rather than incur heavy costs, as he would certainly lose the action. Mr. Thornbury, on looking coolly over the matter, followed his lawyer's advice, but he

could only do so by the sale of the best of his copyhold farms, which had been in his family for more than two centuries.

CHAPTER VI.

MARTHA'S LITTLE LOVE AFFAIR.

THE transactions described in the last chapter extended over the space of two years, and the total loss Mr. Thornbury experienced, including the fine on the copyholds, was something more than five thousand pounds. This naturally caused a great decrease in his income, and he had to take into consideration what reduction he could make in his expenditure, so as to bring it within the limit of his means. The first act of economy he practised was to reduce his own personal expenses. He sold one of his two hunters, and discharged a groom. This was a considerable saving, but still more had to be effected. The only plan he could now devise was either to take Edgar or his daughters from school. For some time he deliberated which of

the two methods he would adopt, both being equally repugnant to his feelings. He much wished his daughters to remain another year under tuition, by which time it was considered their education would be completed; but, on the other hand, he considered it necessary for Edgar's future prospects that he should continue at Eton. True, he had not in any way distinguished himself there, except in boating and cricketing, yet his father imagined that his association with the class of youths there would not only be advantageous to his bearing as a gentleman, but possibly be a stepping-stone to his future advancement.

At last a circumstance occurred which relieved him from the dilemma. One morning Mrs. Thornbury received a letter from the mistress of the school at which the twins were, informing her that, small-pox having broken out among the scholars, the physician deemed it necessary that the others should be immediately removed. This intelligence naturally caused great consternation at the Red House. Mr. Thornbury without delay started for London, and in a few days returned, bringing with him his daughters.

Both the girls seemed somewhat out of health, but this was naturally attributed to the fatigue of the journey, and nothing more was said about the matter.

The morning after their arrival Charity was too unwell to leave her bed, and the family medical attendant was called in. As soon as he saw her he intimated that she was suffering from small-pox, and advised that no one who had not had the disease, or who had not been vaccinated, should be allowed to approach her. Mrs. Thornbury, greatly alarmed, suggested to her husband that he should immediately ascertain whether one of the tenants would not receive Martha into his house during her sister's illness. Mr. Thornbury found one without difficulty, and Martha was informed that it was necessary for her to leave home for a short time, otherwise she also might be attacked by the disease. But Mrs. Thornbury's usual influence over her daughter seemed lost on the present occasion. Martha not only refused to leave the house, but insisted on nursing Charity through her illness. In vain was Mr. Thornbury called in to add the force of his commands to his wife's

arguments ; the usually mild and submissive girl now showed a determination which fairly surprised her parents.

“Do not, dear mother,” she said, “insist on anything of the kind. You know I have never yet disobeyed you, and pray do not oblige me to do so now, for it would grieve me sorely. But nothing shall induce me to leave Charity.”

Her parents, finding her so resolute, allowed her to remain, and Martha immediately installed herself as Charity’s head nurse, sleeping in her room, and never quitting her night or day. The disease fortunately proved to be of the mildest description ; and, thanks to the skill of the doctor, combined with the excellent nursing of Martha and her mother, assisted by Deborah, she rapidly recovered.

Charity was hardly pronounced convalescent when Martha was attacked by the same malady. In her case the disease showed itself in a far more virulent form ; indeed, at one time her life was despaired of, but she in her turn also recovered. Although fortunately the malady left no traces on Charity’s countenance, that of Martha was considerably marked by it, although

not to such an extent as to disfigure her.

A slight incident which occurred before Martha had completely recovered may be here quoted as tending to show how much greater was her anxiety for Charity than for herself. She had one morning, during her recovery, risen from her bed, and was examining her face, which was still scarred, in the looking-glass. When she perceived how much she was marked, the spirit of the young girl of eighteen for a moment, but only for a moment, rose within her, and her eyes filled with tears. Then suddenly brushing them away, she said,

“It is a pity, a great pity; but how fortunate it is there is not the slightest scar on Charity’s beautiful face.”

Mrs. Watkins (Mrs. Thornbury’s mother) died shortly after the disappearance of the small-pox from the Red House. Although she preserved her mental faculties to the last, she had been bedridden for many years, and her death did not take the family by surprise. Since leaving Doncaster, she had lived in a very quiet manner on the interest of £1200 she had accumulated during the time she was in business. By her will she

left the whole amount to be divided among her three grand-children—£500 to each of the girls, and the remainder to Edgar. Although the amount was not large, it was most acceptable to the Thornbury family in the present state of their finances. The girls immediately resolved that they would put their parents to no further expense for their dress, determining that the interest on the money they had inherited should supply them with every requisite for their toilet.

The next two years were particularly quiet ones to the family. The twins had fully recovered from the effects of the small-pox, the only memorial of the malady being some slight marks on Martha's face. Both were now in the prime of girlhood. Martha, it is true, had but few personal attractions beyond being a fine, well-grown, healthy young woman. The best feature in her face was certainly her mouth, which was not only beautifully formed, but, when she smiled, displayed a very regular set of teeth, white as the purest ivory. Her smile had, moreover, something exceedingly sweet in it, but unfortunately her family alone had the

advantage of it. She was naturally of an extremely nervous and timid temperament, which became very apparent in the presence of strangers. Her countenance would then assume an expression of harshness, utterly inconsistent with her natural disposition.

If some objections might be taken to Martha's personal appearance, they were fully neutralised by her mental endowments. To great intelligence she added an amiability of temper rarely equalled. Deborah used to boast that she had never in her life seen her out of temper. It must not be imagined, however, that she was naturally of an apathetic disposition. On the contrary, she was exceedingly impressionable, feeling acutely any tale of woe, and, with the greatest assiduity and kindness, assisting to the utmost of her power those of the poor around her who were in trouble. Yet all this was done in her own peculiarly quiet way. The good she did was generally done in secret, her right hand not knowing what her left hand gave. The first intimation her parents generally received of some sick pillow having been smoothed by her, of some poor mother in her confinement

having had the necessary clothing and linen given her by Martha, or of some one in fever being supplied with tea from the Red House, was from the parties themselves who had been benefited.

Martha's love for her family continued as ardent as ever, yet without becoming in the least more demonstrative. No parents could ever have boasted of a more affectionate daughter than Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury had in Martha; nor any brother of a better tempered, more constant and indulgent sister than Edgar; but it was in her love for Charity that Martha's affectionate disposition principally displayed itself; she seemed never happy when she was out of Charity's sight. And apart from the fact of her being her sister, she had good cause; for a more lovely or lovable creature than Charity it would be difficult to imagine. In person she was exquisitely formed. Her face combined with the mould of the Greek ideal the open confiding expression of the pure thoroughbred English girl. And the expression was not in the least unfaithful: a mean or jealous or unworthy thought she was incapable of harbouring. Though far lovelier and less thought-

ful than Martha she was equally affectionate, and certainly more demonstrative. She was the glory of her mother and the idol of her father; yet she never presumed on the power she must have been aware she possessed over them, but always showed them the respectful love of a good and obedient child. With Edgar she was invariably on the best possible understanding. Martha's love she returned in full, great as it was. In fact, in respect of mind, the two sisters seemed to be one person, neither having a thought or a wish concealed from the other. Though twins, Charity appeared to look upon Martha as an elder sister, always, when in need, applying to her for advice, and modifying her possibly too rapidly formed conclusions under the advice and suggestion of her more sedate counsellor. Martha accepted without hesitation the mental superiority Charity tacitly admitted her to be possessed of, and guided her more volatile sister rather like a grave experienced matron than a girl of the same age.

Although they were now of an age to be introduced into the world and mix in society, they led almost as secluded a life as if they had been

the inmates of a convent. The economical basis on which Mr. Thornbury had arranged his domestic expenditure precluded them from receiving friends at home; and although it was not likely that two such amiable intelligent girls would lack invitations, they had too much pride to profit by them, knowing full well their inability to offer any return. Of course, under such a system, there was but little probability of their forming such acquaintanceships as might ultimately lead to matrimonial engagements. In Martha's case her family had already tacitly set her down as a confirmed old maid: nor did she make the slightest objection to such an arrangement, but quietly answered to the nickname of Tabby, which her brother had bestowed on her. With Charity the case was very different. That she would one day marry both Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury felt perfectly convinced; but they seemed to hold by the old-fashioned idea that marriages were made in heaven, for they took no steps whatever to introduce their child into such society as would lead her to form an eligible alliance. Possibly, after all, there was a slight taint of selfishness in the apparent

apathy the parents showed as to the future prospects of their child. They loved her too dearly to entertain willingly the subject of parting with her; and although they admitted to themselves that the time would come when she must leave them, they seemed resolved to defer the evil day as long as possible.

It is stated, however, on somewhat doubtful authority, that Martha's girlhood did not pass without a love affair. If so, this was the only secret she did not confide to her sister. At the same time, it must be admitted that she did not show the slightest anger when Charity joked with her on the subject. All that can be really proved is, that a grave, semi-pious, and very mild flirtation was carried on, when she was about twenty years of age, between her and the Rev. Isaiah Jones, of Jesus College, Oxford, and only curate to the vicar of the neighbouring parish of Brentwood. The vicar was a confirmed invalid, who resided almost entirely on the Continent for the benefit of his health, leaving the duties of his cure of souls to his subordinate. In those days the students of Jesus College, Oxford, were composed almost entirely of Welsh-

men; and the Rev. Isaiah himself was from that Principality. The students were all described by a wag of the period as being short of stature, red-haired, and deeply marked with the small-pox, and it was asserted that only one of them, a Mr. Jones, had wine in his rooms. How far this might have been true it is impossible to say; but at all events Isaiah had several personal attributes in common with his brother-students, for he was short of stature, with hair almost the colour of the setting sun, and it was clearly proved by his face that, if he had ever been vaccinated, it had been performed in the most imperfect manner. Moreover, it was certain that he was not the Mr. Jones who had wine in his rooms. He was poor—miserably poor—but thoroughly honest; and as he would as soon have committed a robbery as incurred a debt which he could not pay—and as the only way he could have obtained the wine would have been by taking it on credit, there could be no doubt that he was not the distinguished Mr. Jones of Jesus College.

On his promotion to his curacy he gained but little. His salary was only fifty pounds a-year,

and ten pounds of that, it was currently reported, he forwarded annually to his widowed mother, who kept a small general shop near Welshpool. But it must not be imagined that he spent the whole of the balance on himself. The Rev. Isaiah Jones, with a stipend that a journeyman mechanic would have spurned, was liberal in proportion to his means—liberal almost to imprudence. He could resist no tale of woe; and as his curacy was situated in the heart of a poor agricultural district, where the rates were five shillings in the pound, it may easily be imagined that he heard many. Small as his own means were, there were but few of the gentry in the neighbourhood who would assist him from their private purses. “Did they not pay heavy poor’s rates, and was not that sufficient?” “If the poor were in want, was there not the poor-house for them? and if sick, was the parish surgeon not paid to attend them at their own homes?—and what could they want more?” They omitted to take into consideration, however, that medicines were expensive articles, and that the surgeon’s remuneration averaged only sixpence per case, including

drugs and medical comforts; and that between that small sum and the requirements of the patient, much was needed from private charity. Again, it should be stated that the reverend gentleman was not popular with the surrounding gentry, though greatly liked by the poor. There was a certain independence of manner about him, a certain off-hand candid manner of expostulation, which hardly harmonised with his position and his too evident low origin. Besides, his dress was exceedingly shabby, and his toilet generally so little attended to, that it was impossible he should be tolerated in good society; at least, such was the opinion of the majority of the ladies in the vicinity.

The only person who really actively assisted him in his exertions on behalf of the poor was Martha Thornbury. They frequently met at the bed of the sick and dying, and often brought both comfort and consolation into families whose fate would have been sad indeed save for their kind ministrations. By degrees Mr. Jones came under the notice of Mr. Thornbury, who invited him to his house, and he became a frequent guest at his table. He also was a great favour-

ite with Mrs. Thornbury, who, though now a member of the Church of England, still retained many of her original Quaker predilections. The poor curate's contempt for the vanities of the world pleased her greatly, although her pleasure would have been enhanced had he been more particular in respect to the neatness of his attire. Like the Friends, he entertained a far higher opinion of the value of good works than is generally found out of that philanthropic community. He was likewise an especial favourite with Deborah, who admired immensely his candid straightforward way of speaking his mind. She clearly saw he was no respecter of persons—a fact which accorded well with her republican and Quaker-like views of social equality. Charity also from the first liked him in her heart, although she used to quiz him terribly when she was alone with Martha.

“My dear,” Charity one day said to her sister, “the pains your reverend friend takes about the poor does him great credit.”

“He certainly is most anxious in their behalf,” said Martha.

“At the same time it appears to me that he

takes a great deal more trouble in finding out new cases than is it all necessary."

"How so?"

"He seeks them occasionally in localities where he must know, if his zeal gave him time for reflection, that there is not the slightest probability of finding them."

"I never remarked that," said Martha.

"You surprise me," said Charity. "I really shall begin to think that man has bewitched you, Martha. Why, nothing can be plainer than the useless trouble he sometimes gives himself in finding out the poor."

"Give me an instance," said Martha.

"Well, in coming here at least three days a week to find them."

"What nonsense you talk, Charity!" said Martha.

"What other possible reason can he have for coming, then?" said Charity, with a look of well simulated surprise.

"To see papa, of course."

"Well, Martha, I hardly think that can be the case," said Charity. "Papa only speaks to him during dinner-time, and as he has the bad

habit of falling asleep immediately afterwards, I hardly think that can be the cause of the reverend gentleman's frequent visits. Try again, Martha."

"Perhaps it is to see mamma."

"That can't well be the case, Martha; there must be some other cause."

"I have it now," said Martha, laughing, "it is to see you, Charity."

"Now, dear Martha, I am delighted to hear you say so," said Charity, "for it takes a great weight off my mind. Do you know, I began to fear you were the point of attraction? Over and over again I fancied you were in danger of becoming the wife of a little Welsh parson. They say, by-the-by, Martha, that all little parsons become very fat as they get older, and Isaiah's appearance would hardly be improved if that were to be his fate. And do tell me what his prospects are; he surely cannot intend to be always a poor curate on fifty pounds a year."

"No, he hopes some day to be taken into partnership with a person who keeps a boys' school near Welshpool; and, besides, he ex-

pects to be appointed a curate in the same parish the school is in. If so, he may not be so badly off after all."

"Very true, my dear, but tell me how it was he made you his confidant in all those interesting little family affairs? I should have thought they would rather have been a subject for him to entertain papa with. Martha, my dear," Charity continued, "stop, ere it is too late. Believe me, you are not adapted for the wife of a schoolmaster. The boys would play all sorts of pranks on you with impunity. They would lock you up in your room, and would not release you again unless you gave them the key of your fruit-closet, or some such thing; and besides, if ever you got one punished for his bad behaviour, it is more than probable you would ask his pardon for your unkindness afterwards. Martha, you must not dream of such an incongruous union."

At last, the frequency of the reverend gentleman's visits to the Red House began to excite the curiosity of the servants, whose remarks among themselves on the subject were of the

most explicit description. True, neither Mr. nor Mrs Thornbury saw anything remarkable in his behaviour. They knew full well the general invitation they had given him, which had been dictated purely by the knowledge of his great poverty, and by the thought that it might sometimes spare him the expense of dining at home. The idea of a poor Welsh curate falling in love with the daughter of an English squire, was far too absurd to enter into Mr. Thornbury's imagination for a moment. That Martha had a strong liking for the energetic, kind-hearted little man, there can be no doubt, and that she felt much pleasure in his society is equally certain; but whether she ever really loved him is a doubtful point. That he loved her was a far more certain matter. The poor widow, at whose cottage he lodged remarked to Deborah that she could not think what had lately come over the parson, for he was for ever brushing his hair, and was, moreover, becoming very particular about the "getting-up" of his linen, which had till lately been a matter of perfect indifference to him.

Deborah made no remark at the time, but the

words of Mr. Jones's landlady left a deep impression on her mind. Although she strongly approved of the reverend gentleman's ideas of equality in theological matters, she by no means approved of them in relation to her young mistress; in fact, Mr. Thornbury himself could hardly have been more indignant at the thought of the curate's proposing for his daughter than was Deborah. Still, she resolved not to speak of the subject either to Mr. or Mrs. Thornbury till she had more certain proof of the feelings and intentions of the curate, thinking it possible she might be in error. At the same time she resolved to watch the young couple narrowly, and then, if she found it necessary, she could put her master and mistress on their guard.

One morning when Mr. Thornbury was absent, and his wife and Charity were occupied in some other part of the house, Martha and the curate were left by themselves in the drawing-room. Little conversation had passed between them, Martha's attention having been fixed upon some flowers she was embroidering. The curate was apparently absorbed in the contents of a book

he held in his hand. The careful observer might, however, have perceived that he never turned over the leaves of the book he pretended to be reading, but that his eyes were incessantly wandering from it to his companion. Suddenly, as if impelled by a power which he found it impossible to resist, he threw the book on the sofa, hurriedly walked up to Martha, threw himself on his knees by her side, and grasped her hand, which she immediately and angrily withdrew. Whether this behaviour on her part brought the curate to his senses, or whether he recovered them spontaneously, it is impossible to say; but he abruptly rose from his knees, and, without saying a word, seized his hat and left the room. But Martha's behaviour was not the only shock he received on the occasion. On leaving the drawing-room, he saw Deborah standing before the door, which had been open, with a peculiarly stern expression on her countenance. He passed her without saying a word, and left the house, which he never afterwards entered. In what manner he was informed that his future visits would not be acceptable, it is impossible to say. Most probably the intelli-

gence was conveyed to him by Deborah, acting under the orders of her mistress. Certainly, Mr. Thornbury knew nothing of it ; for he frequently expressed his wonder at the continued absence of the parson. Martha never saw her reverend admirer again, for he shortly afterwards left the neighbourhood for the appointment he had spoken of in Wales. Whether Martha had really been offended at his behaviour, she alone knew ; but if so, her anger in time certainly vanished, for long after he had become the little fat schoolmaster predicted by Charity, she spoke of him as having been a very pious, exemplary young man, and one much to be admired.

CHAPTER VII.

CHARITY'S LOVE AFFAIR.

WE stated in the last chapter that although Mr. Thornbury had greatly reduced his expenditure, and had even discharged a groom and sold one of his hunters, he still kept a horse for his own use. In fact, he appeared to carry his love of hunting so far beyond the bounds of hobbyism, that it almost assumed the appearance of insanity. And the older he got the more the passion seemed to increase, his adventures at the last "meeting" generally forming the staple of his conversation till the next one. He spoke frequently in terms of the highest admiration of different gentlemen connected with the hunt. He used to regret that his straitened circumstances precluded his inviting them to his house, as he was persuaded that his

wife and daughters would be as much pleased with their society as he himself was. As, however, their principal qualifications in his eyes appeared to consist in their being remarkably good fellows, bold riders, and possessed of fine strong horses, Mrs. Thornbury and the girls hardly seemed to feel the loss so keenly as he did.

One evening, after a long and fatiguing day's "run," Mr. Thornbury, having finished his dinner, and taken a lengthened nap afterwards, suddenly informed the girls that he had good news to tell them. That day, he said, the hunt had agreed to give a ball to the ladies and friends of the members, and it was to come off within a fortnight at the Assembly Rooms at X——. He further stated that one gentleman among them, being a bachelor, and a stranger in that part of the country, had no acquaintance to whom he could give his ladies' ticket, and had in consequence offered it to him (Mr. Thornbury) if he chose to make use of it.

"So now, girls," he continued, "you must set to work as quickly as you can, and get all your smartest things in readiness, as I expect you to

be the belles of the room. I have no doubt that before the ball comes off I shall be able to get a ticket for your mother; so we shall make altogether a snug little party of our own."

"My dear," said Mrs. Thornbury, "you must leave me out altogether. I certainly do not mean to say that such amusements are sinful, as wiser and better heads than mine hold the contrary, but I have never yet been present at a ball, and I have a dislike, a prejudice you may call it if you please, against going to one now, when I am getting an old woman; so you must go without me."

The girls here joined their father in persuading Mrs. Thornbury to change her mind, but without effect; and at last they gave up the attempt and submitted, though with real regret, to going to the ball without her.

Never since the birth of the twins had there been so much excitement in the Red House as during the fortnight preceding the ball. Not only were numerous family conclaves held, but the family carriage was dragged from its resting-place in the coach-house, where it had remained perfectly undisturbed since the collapse of the

Pentalleck mining affair. It was now cleaned and brushed up, to make it look as well as possible, and the twins made almost daily journeys in it to X——, especially to the houses of the principal mercer and the head milliner of the town. Long and mysterious were the transactions which took place in these two establishments, and vast was the amount of thought bestowed upon them. Experiments of the most profound description were made to discover what colours harmonized best with others, and with the complexion, and what ornaments for the hair were most becoming. The subject was one overladen with difficulties. In the first place, the sisters had determined to dress exactly alike; and as Charity's complexion was a beautiful blonde, while Martha was somewhat of a sallow brunette, it will readily be admitted that the colours which were adapted to the one were hardly suitable to the other. As the idea of dressing alike was never even thought of being abandoned, it was some time before they arrived at a definite conclusion on all the matters brought under their notice. At last, however, all was satisfactorily arranged, and the

dressmaker progressed with her labours to both the sisters' hearts content.

The evening of the ball at last arrived. At dinner Mr. Thornbury was informed by his daughters that their dresses had been completed in the most satisfactory manner, and they had no doubt they should at least do him no discredit on the occasion. At table neither of the girls showed the slightest appetite, so great was their excitement. Mr. Thornbury continually pressed them to eat, reminding them of the fatigue they were about to undergo; and his wife added her persuasions, but without avail. To oblige their parents, they swallowed a few mouthfuls, but the effort was a painful one, and they soon gave it up.

Dinner was hardly over before they left the table and sought their room to commence their toilets. When they entered it they found that Deborah, and a young girl who assisted her, had prepared everything for them. Their beds and all the chairs in the room were perfectly covered with smart articles of female attire. It indeed seemed a puzzle how two young ladies could contrive to put on their persons

such a quantity of dress. Their courage, however, seemed quite equal to the occasion, and they commenced to dress with a resolution that nothing could daunt. It was amusing to observe the anxiety of Deborah on the occasion. When she first heard of their intention to be present at the ball, her Quaker prejudices immediately developed themselves, and for several days she was silent and sulky. By degrees, however, as different articles of millinery were sent in and placed in her custody, she gave way, and when the evening of the ball at last arrived, she was scarcely less interested in the matter than were the sisters themselves. Her admiration of Martha and Charity increased with every fresh ornament they put on, till at last the prim Quakeress became quite enthusiastic. When their toilets were completed, she stood and gazed at them with wonder. Charity especially drew forth her admiration, which increased till she could not suppress her feelings, but, forgetting the relative position of mistress and servant, cast her arms around the girl and kissed her affectionately, to the great danger of her dress, saying: "Bless thee, my child; thou

art indeed a beauty." Nor was Deborah without great excuse for this freedom of manner. A lovelier object than Charity at this moment was, it would be difficult to imagine. She was radiant with beauty. It seemed to cast over the more homely features of Martha a portion of its loveliness, and, instead of being a mere foil to her sister, she seemed handsome in the reflected light. When they descended into the drawing-room, their parents were equally delighted with them; and it is more than probable that, at the moment, Mrs. Thornbury regretted the resolution she had formed, not to make one of the party to the ball.

The carriage being now at the door, Mr. Thornbury and his daughters entered it, and in due time they arrived at the Assembly Rooms. As they were rather late, the rooms were already filled, and the dancing had commenced. For some minutes after their entrance the girls were a little nervous, but they soon recovered their self-possession. Their appearance produced a great sensation, and elicited much admiration; for they were certainly, as Mr. Thornbury had predicted, the belles of the room. Charity es-

pecially attracted attention, and numerous were the gentlemen who begged to be introduced to her. Martha also had many admirers, and danced as often as her sister. She was doubly happy; for she had not only pleasure in the attentions she herself received, but on all sides she heard high praises of Charity's beauty. Martha was frequently asked by her partners who that lovely girl was, and she felt intense pride in answering, "She is my sister."

In the course of the evening Mr. Thornbury introduced to Charity Mr. Morecombe. He was a remarkably handsome man, of gentlemanly appearance and manners.

"To this gentleman," said Mr. Thornbury, "you are indebted for the pleasure you are now enjoying. It was he who kindly gave you his ladies' ticket. Without it, my dear, you would have remained in solitude at home."

"While I acquit you personally of all obligation," said Mr. Morecombe, gallantly, "I must hold, at the same time, that the Hunt owe me a debt of gratitude for my liberality." Then, turning to Charity, he requested that she would do him the honour of being his partner in the

next dance. Charity, unfortunately, was engaged for the three next dances; after these were finished, she would have much pleasure in accepting his offer. Mr. Morecombe continued in conversation with her till the orchestra sounded the prelude for the next dance, when she left him to join her partner. Between the next two dances she conversed with Mr. Morecombe, and was also his partner in more than one quadrille afterwards. In fact, so much attention did he pay to her, that the company began to notice it, and make their observations. All this was observed by Martha with much interest, not unmixed with anxiety. Not that there was anything in the stranger's manner to her sister that transgressed the strictest rules of good society; but, at the same time, she could perceive that he was evidently much struck with her, and she also fancied that Charity was not quite indifferent to the attentions she was receiving.

All went on merrily till it was time to depart, and then Mr. Thornbury escorted Martha, and Mr. Morecombe Charity, to the carriage. On Mr. Morecombe's taking leave, Mr. Thornbury said he should be happy to see him at the Red

House, and Mr. Morecombe readily replied that he should have much pleasure in calling. As the carriage drove off, Mr. Thornbury threw himself back in it, exclaiming, "That Morecombe is one of the finest fellows I know;" a remark which did not pass without receiving due attention from his daughters. Not a word was spoken by either of the party during their journey home, Mr. Thornbury having fallen fast asleep, and Martha and her sister being too profoundly absorbed in their own meditations to have any wish for conversation.

The sisters did not rise till a late hour next day, being much fatigued by their exertions on the previous evening. In fact, they did not see their parents till they met at the dinner-table. During their meal the conversation ran almost entirely on the events of the night before, and the different persons they had met at the ball. Mrs. Thornbury made many inquiries about what had taken place, and in spite of her professed disregard of all subjects connected with dress and such frivolities, the questions she asked as to the costume of the ladies were many and minute. Mr. Thornbury took but little share in the

conversation, but what he did say was principally in commendation of his friend Mr. Morecombe.

"You will most probably see him to-morrow," he said, addressing his wife; "and then you will be able to judge of him yourself. I have made an appointment with him about a horse I wish to buy, and I have no doubt he will keep it."

Strange to say, neither of the girls mentioned his name, although they conversed fluently enough about the qualifications of their other partners.

Next morning the girls rose at their usual hour. When they descended into the breakfast-room it was easy to perceive that, although they were dressed with great simplicity, they had taken much pains with their toilet. During breakfast the principal part of the conversation was carried on between Martha and Mrs. Thornbury, Charity appearing the whole time, to use a French expression, *réveuse*. When breakfast was over they retired to the drawing-room, Charity continuing as silent as before—a fact which particularly attracted the attention of Martha, who was watching her with much interest.

“What sort of a man is this Mr. Morecombe?” inquired Mrs. Thornbury of Martha. “Your papa seems much pleased with him.”

“He is certainly a most gentlemanly and intelligent man,” replied Martha, “and one of the handsomest I have ever seen.”

“What interest has he in the horse your papa wants to purchase?” asked Mrs. Thornbury.

“I really do not know, mamma,” said Martha. “When Mr. Morecombe bade us good-bye, papa asked him to come and see him. He certainly said he would do so, but whether he made any appointment with him before that, of course I cannot tell.”

“At any rate,” said Mrs. Thornbury, seating herself at a window which commanded a view of the carriage-drive leading to the house, “we must show him all the civility we can, after his kindness to you about the ticket for the ball.”

For more than an hour following this conversation little more than an occasional desultory remark passed between the mother and daughters; but at last Mrs. Thornbury suddenly ex-

claimed : " Here he is, girls ; what a beautiful horse he is riding ! "

Of the latter part of the sentence, short though the whole was, the young ladies heard nothing ; for no sooner were they aware that Mr. Morecombe was approaching than they hurried from the room to put some finishing touch to their hair if possible, or to arrange any little irregularity which might have occurred to their dress.

Charity was first ready, and she left her room to join the party below. A few minutes afterwards Martha followed her. When she descended the stairs, to her great surprise she found Charity standing irresolute in the hall, evidently trying to summon up courage to enter the sitting-room. She did not notice Martha's approach till she was close beside her, and then she started and seemed greatly confused. Martha took no notice of her sister's agitation ; but, gently passing her arm round her waist, she kissed her affectionately. Charity returned the kiss, and, taking her sister by the hand, rewarded her with a look of intense gratitude. The pair then entered the room together. Not a word had

been uttered by either, but a mute and interesting conversation had, nevertheless, passed between them.

When the sisters entered the room they found Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury in it, as well as Mr. Morecombe. After the customary greetings, the conversation turned on general subjects. If Mr. Morecombe, on the night of the ball, appeared attractive to the young ladies, he seemed still more so now, when they could judge of him without their attention being distracted by other things. He spoke on many subjects, and on all with great discretion; his remarks evidently making a great impression on his hearers. His visit was a long one—perhaps longer than etiquette altogether warranted; but he made his company so agreeable that the objection was not much felt. During his stay, he left the room for a short time to converse with Mr. Thornbury on the ostensible object of his visit, and when he returned he found that lunch had been prepared for him. As he was about to leave, Mr. Thornbury pressed him to name some day in the following week when he would dine with them. Mr. Morecombe, however, appeared at

first somewhat averse to naming the day.

"I should have had much pleasure in accepting your invitation," he said ; "but the fact is, I have a very aged relative, an uncle, who resides in the south of Devonshire. He is a confirmed old bachelor, very wealthy, very eccentric, and easily offended. I am the only relative he has in the world, and, for certain family reasons, it would be rash and unwise on my part to displease him. He has written requesting me to go there as quickly as I can, as he is very ill. To tell you the truth, I suspect there is very little the matter with him, and that he is only nervous. I wrote, in reply, saying that I much regretted his indisposition, and would start off immediately if he especially desired it ; but that, as I had some business of importance to do in this part of the country, I must visit him at the present moment at great inconvenience to myself ; and that I hoped, if possible, he would allow me to defer my journey for a fortnight or three weeks longer. I am now awaiting his reply, which I greatly fear will be adverse to my wishes, for if he specially desires my presence, I must start off directly."

"But when do you expect his answer?"

"In the course of five days, at the latest."

"Then dine with us on Saturday, if you have no better engagement," said Mr. Thornbury ; "I expect my son Edgar home from Eton to-morrow, and I am sure he will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"You are really so kind that I cannot refuse your invitation," said Mr. Morecombe. "On Saturday I will be with you, without fail."

The excitement which prevailed in the Red House during the two days previous to this momentous Saturday was scarcely less than that which had preceded the ball, although the young ladies preserved more silence on the subject.

Edgar arrived, as expected, the day after Mr. Morecombe's visit, and his family were naturally delighted to see him. He was now a very handsome, gentlemanly young fellow : modest in his demeanour, without being in any way diffident. His Eton education was finished, and though it could hardly be said that he was an accomplished scholar, he had not been altogether idle ; and, without exaggeration, he was better educated than the average of young gentlemen of

his years. As yet nothing had been decided as to what profession he should follow, his parents differing somewhat in opinion on the subject. His mother wished him to enter holy orders, while his father thought he would succeed better as a barrister. The lad himself would have chosen the army, for which profession he was admirably fitted; but, as Mr. Thornbury had no influence at the Horse Guards, and the expense of purchasing a commission, as well as an outfit, and the allowance which would be necessary for him as an officer and a gentleman, were more than he could afford, the idea was definitely negatived. Both his parents had now, however, admitted that their son's future profession must be decided, and they resolved to entertain the subject seriously as soon as the first burst of pleasure on his arrival had somewhat subsided.

Attractive as Mr. Morecombe had already appeared to the Thornbury family, he surpassed himself at the dinner-table. He conversed fluently and well on every subject which came under discussion, and when relating his adventures in various foreign countries (for he had been a great traveller), he spoke of the part he

had taken in them with so much modesty as to raise him still higher in the opinion of his hearers. Mr. Thornbury and Edgar were both delighted with him; Martha admired him greatly, and Charity's good feeling towards him evidently surpassed her sister's. Nor was he by any means destitute of that "small talk" which is so much admired by ladies. He knew a great deal of the fashionable world, and spoke of its manners and habits with such ease as clearly proved that he had lived much in it. Moreover, he mentioned the names of several notables of high rank, with whom he was on terms of intimacy.

After the ladies had retired, the conversation turned principally on dogs and horses, and matters connected with the sporting world; on all of which subjects he appeared to be particularly well versed; so much so, in fact, that both father and son, themselves no indifferent judges in affairs of the kind, seemed to regard him as a very high authority. In the course of their conversation Mr. Thornbury casually asked him if he had again heard from his uncle.

"To my great surprise, I have this day re-

ceived a letter from him," said Mr. Morecombe, "for I imagined it would have required a longer time to obtain an answer; and besides, I have generally found that to write by return of post is by no means the old gentleman's habit. I am happy to say his letter was couched in a most friendly tone. He says that as his health is much improved I need not now pay him the visit till I have finished my business in this part of the country, and I shall certainly profit by his permission."

The conversation again turned on dogs and horses. Edgar remarked that he had lately been much disappointed in not being able to conclude a purchase he had wished to make. A man, a helper in a livery stable much patronised by the Eton scholars, had a very fine retriever for sale, at a tolerably moderate price. Before the bargain was definitely concluded, however, a brother scholar had heard of the dog, and offering a far higher price than the sum originally named, he had got possession of it.

"Do you really want a retriever?" inquired Mr. Morecombe.

"I do indeed, and I am sorry to say I do not

know anybody who has got one for sale," was Edgar's reply.

"Nor I neither," said Mr. Morecombe "but if you will accept one as a present from me, I shall have much pleasure in offering it to you. I have as beautiful a dog of the breed as man ever cast eyes on, and he is at your service."

"Oh dear, no, I could not think of accepting it in that way," said Edgar, colouring at the same time with pleasure at the idea of having such a dog, "I could not think of depriving you of him."

"To tell you the candid truth," said Mr. Morecombe, "besides the pleasure I shall have in obliging you, it will be doing me a service if you will accept him. I am very fond of the dog, but travelling about as I do, you may easily suppose I am in frequent danger of losing him, and it would be a satisfaction to me to know that he is in good hands, so I will take no refusal."

After a little more ill-simulated demur on the part of Edgar, the dog was accepted, and Mr. Morecombe promised to bring him in the course of the ensuing week. On the Monday following

he arrived with the retriever, and a beautiful animal he was. Edgar, as was to be expected, was perfectly delighted with his present. Mr. Morecombe remained with the family the whole of the day, and made himself as agreeable as possible.

He now became a regular visitor at the house. In consequence of a severe attack of the gout, Mr. Thornbury was confined to his room, and Edgar being frequently absent, the stranger was thus thrown into the society of the young ladies. In a very short time he began to show such marked attentions to Charity, that they became a subject of conversation with the whole of the establishment. Charity, on her part, received his attentions with evident pleasure, and everything promised a speedy *dénouement*. At last, Mr. Morcombe called one morning, and by chance found Charity alone. He conversed with her for some time, and afterwards left the house. During the remainder of the day she was silent, thoughtful, and reserved. At night, on retiring to rest, Charity said abruptly to her sister,

“Martha, dear, I have a secret to tell you.”

“What is it?” inquired Martha, at the same time forming her own conclusion as to the nature of the communication her sister was about to make.

“Mr. Morecombe has made me an offer.”

“And did you accept him?” inquired Martha, in a tone of great anxiety.

“Well, I hardly know,” was Charity’s reply. “I told him to speak to mamma.”

Martha, by way of answer, kissed her sister affectionately, and nothing more was said that evening upon the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MORECOMBE SUCCEEDS IN HIS SUIT.

THE day following Charity's confession to her sister that Mr. Morecombe had made her an offer, a letter was brought to Mr. Thornbury by private hand. Although the person who delivered it was a stranger, the young ladies instantly guessed from whom it came, and also what were its contents. After the lapse of an hour, during which the parents had read it over and conversed together on its contents, the sisters were sent for to their father's room. They felt somewhat nervous, and for some moments after they entered a dead silence prevailed, which was broken by Mr. Thornbury intimating that their friend Mr. Morecombe had written to request that he might be allowed to become a suitor for Charity's

hand. Although he (Mr. Thornbury) would strongly insist on his right as parent to put his veto on such a proposition should he consider it necessary, at the same time he wished to ascertain what were Charity's own feelings on the subject, as in case she objected he would immediately put a stop to any further correspondence with Mr. Morecombe.

It was indeed a painful as well as puzzling moment for the poor girl. Had she followed the bent of her own inclination, probably she would have answered that she was much pleased at receiving the addresses of so brilliant, gentlemanly, and handsome a man as Mr. Morecombe, one who, she felt assured, was actuated by the highest feeling of honour. But as such an avowal would have been a breach of propriety on the part of a young lady of a well-regulated mind, she remained for some moments undecided what to answer. At last, and evidently with considerable effort, she stammered out, "Just as you and mamma please."

Mr. Thornbury, with his obtuse male wit, hardly considered this answer sufficiently definite, and pressed her for a more explicit one;

but his wife, who had far more penetration in matters of the kind, coolly said to him,

"You may go on, my dear; the answer our dear Charity has given us is quite sufficient."

An expression of surprise passed over Mr. Thornbury's face at these words, but he made no remark.

"I must say, my dear children," continued Mr. Thornbury, "that the spirit in which Mr. Morecombe's letter is written is perfectly in accordance with the high estimation in which I hold him, both as a man and a gentleman. That I may satisfy myself fully as to his character and respectability, he has thought it better to absent himself for a few days, and with that intention he has made a journey to London, to wait there with intense anxiety an answer to his letter. Now, my dears, as I said before, I have a great respect for Mr. Morecombe, but at the same time I admit that I am not sufficiently acquainted with him to give a decided answer without making further inquiries. The question now before us is, what steps we had better take, so as to obtain the information without in any way hurting his feelings."

"I quite agree with you, my dear," said Mrs. Thornbury; "but might it not be very unpleasant for him to answer by letter questions connected with his family and his affairs? I think perhaps the better plan would be for you to invite him to the house, and then you could talk over the matter."

After a great deal of conversation on the subject, in which Martha took but little part, and Charity none whatever, it was at last decided that he should be invited to the house. A draught of the letter to be written having been agreed on, the family separated, and the girls retired to their room.

"I think papa and mamma have entertained Mr. Morecombe's offer in a very kind and sensible manner," remarked Martha, when they were alone.

Charity, who was evidently out of humour, made no reply, but stood at the window, with her back to her sister, apparently absorbed in watching the rooks on the elm tree before her, and pretending not to have heard Martha's remark.

"I do not think," continued Martha, "that

they could have adopted a more delicate way of inquiring into his family affairs."

"Indeed!" said Charity, turning round somewhat angrily to her sister; "I should like to know what need there is for making any inquiries at all? I am sure his family is quite as good as our own."

"Very probably," said Martha, mildly; "but for all that, it is only prudent on papa's part to insist on knowing something more about him, especially when your happiness is at stake."

"My happiness!" said Charity, with a slight sneer. "Do you think it will be increased by your annoying him with impertinent questions? I can judge of people as quickly and correctly as any of you, and I am certain a more honourable man does not exist. Make inquiries about him, indeed!"

"Now, Charity, my dear, do be reasonable," said Martha, in a conciliating tone. "Papa is acting in the matter solely with a view to your welfare."

"If you think so," said Charity, sharply, "pray try to persuade papa not to send that letter."

Poor Martha! she had no experience in matters

of the kind, but she judged that to argue against a young girl in the flush of her first love, would be attended with no good result. She therefore wisely dropped the conversation, and resolved to wait patiently until her sister should be in a better temper.

The letter was dispatched to Mr. Morecombe as agreed on, and three days afterwards he made his appearance at the Red House. He was received by Mr. Thornbury in the library, and the door was closed upon them. After a short conversation on general matters, Mr. Thornbury, with some nervousness in his manner, indirectly advanced to the subject they had met to converse on.

"I hope your uncle is quite well?" he began.

"Thank you," said Mr. Morecombe, "but I am sorry to say the state of his health is far from satisfactory. When I was in London, I received a letter which stated that he wished to see me as soon as possible on matters of importance, and I am afraid I sent a somewhat clumsy excuse. I would willingly have obliged him, for I have a great respect for the old gentleman, but strong as that wish was I was too anxious

to know the reply to the proposal I had sent to you, to think of other matters. I must not, however, delay my visit to him much longer : after the kindnesses I have received from him, it would be impolitic as well as ungrateful on my part."

"I think you would do wisely to pay him an early visit," said Mr. Thornbury. "At his time of life, and in his state of health—if for no other reasons—it would be wrong to offend him. But now let us speak on matters more immediately concerning ourselves. I received your letter, as you are aware ; and I will candidly admit, whatever may be the result, that I felt complimented by its contents. But at the same time, I am sure you will excuse me, if, as Charity's father, and having her interest at heart, I put some questions to you touching your prospects and the state of your finances."

"I will answer truthfully, and without the slightest hesitation, every question you may be pleased to put to me," said Mr. Morecombe. "Pray do not feel the least reserve about that."

"In the first place," said Mr. Thornbury, "it is a duty incumbent on me to ascertain what

means you may have for supporting a wife. I will not disguise from you that I am not a wealthy man, although neither am I a poor one. I understand you have, unfortunately, no profession."

"I am sorry to say I have not," replied Mr. Morecombe. "When very young I held a commission in the army, but owing to a dispute with my commanding officer (in which, I unhesitatingly admit, I was to blame) I left the service; and since that time, I regret to say, I have not adopted any other profession. You see I am frank, for I believe it is better to tell you all than to conceal anything from you. My present means, I am sorry to say, are not large. I have an income of about four hundred a year, arising from some improved rents of houses in London. If, however, this security is not of the most eligible description, it has at least one good quality—the rents are all paid regularly. I have not a tenant a single quarter in arrears."

"Are the houses held on long leases?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"I am sorry to say they are not; in fact, I do not think they have more than twenty years to

run ; but they will certainly last longer than my uncle's life ; and then I conscientiously believe I shall inherit more than fifteen hundred a year. I am his heir, and the only relation he has in the world. He and I are all that are left of a formerly numerous family. If you would like a fuller description of the house property, I shall be happy at any time to place the particulars before you ; I wish, as I have said, to conceal nothing from you."

"Thank you," said Mr. Thornbury ; "perhaps on some future occasion I will speak to you again on the subject. Let me now ask you another question. Does your uncle know of your wish to marry Charity ? It would be better, I think, that he should be acquainted with your intention, as I shall of course like to have his consent to the match."

"At present he knows nothing whatever about it," replied Mr. Morecombe, "and that is another reason I have for wishing to pay him a visit. It is better that I should inform him of it myself, than that he should hear of it from a stranger, as it is possible he might conjure up objections, which I could dispel without any difficulty were

I beside him. He is, I can assure you, very eccentric, as you might easily discover, if you were to make inquiries respecting him. Do you know anyone in Devonshire?"

"Not a soul," said Mr. Thornbury.

"Because, if you were acquainted with anyone in the neighbourhood of St. Blaise, near Exeter, you might hear some droll-enough anecdotes about old Squire Jacob Morecombe. I propose going down to see him in a fortnight, and if you would write to him, say about a week after my departure, informing him of my contemplated marriage, I will have him fully prepared for the intelligence, and I have not the slightest doubt as to the result."

"Very well," said Mr. Thornbury. "Now let me speak to you about Charity's expectations, that you may not be disappointed afterwards in that matter. As I told you before, I am far from being a rich man, and my child will bring with her but a small dowry. Charity has five hundred pounds of her own, which she inherited from her grandmother. To that sum I shall add fifteen hundred more, making in all two thousand pounds. Until my death there is not

the slightest prospect of her receiving more."

"I beg to assure you," said Mr. Morecombe, with an expression of great satisfaction, "that it is more than I expected. Believe me, I should have been perfectly satisfied if she had not had a shilling. It is herself I desire, and not her fortune."

"I am pleased to hear you say so. Now let me ask you another question: When you are married, where do you propose to reside? I am devotedly attached to my child, and I should wish that, if possible, she should live near me."

"And I sincerely desire it too," said Mr. Morecombe. "What I should like would be to find a convenient house, with about forty or fifty acres of grazing land, as near you as possible. We might live on it in a strictly economical manner until the death of my uncle. Afterwards my great ambition would be to buy some snug estate and farm it myself, as I have a great wish to become an agriculturist."

The conversation continued for some time longer in the same satisfactory strain. At last the interview was concluded, and Mr. Morecombe joined the young ladies, who had no

difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that Mr. Thornbury had given him a favourable reception, so strongly was satisfaction expressed on his countenance. After a short time Martha pleaded some excuse, and left the room. It is unnecessary to go over in detail what passed between the lovers during Martha's absence; suffice it to say that, when she again made her appearance, she found them sitting beside each other in a most amicable manner. After a moment of somewhat awkward silence, Charity said to her sister,

"See, Martha, dear, what a beautiful present Mr. Morecombe has made me!" at the same time holding out her arm, on which was a bracelet of considerable value.

This remark seemed to set all parties at their ease, and they conversed together for the remainder of the morning with perfect self-possession. When Mrs. Thornbury descended to the drawing-room shortly before dinner was announced, she gave Mr. Morecombe a most friendly reception, and told him she should always be happy to see him. He certainly profited by this invitation, for until he left the

neighbourhood for his uncle's he was a daily visitor at the Red House.

It would be doing Mr. Thornbury an injustice to imagine that we have here set down all the conversation which took place between himself and Mr. Morecombe in the library. Mr. Morecombe had, unasked, placed in the hands of Mr. Thornbury a list of the houses in London from which he derived his income. The latter at once wrote to his solicitor, requesting him to make full inquiries as to the nature of the property, and the validity of Mr. Morecombe's title to it. In a few days arrived a most satisfactory reply. All the tenants were of a very respectable class, and at once acknowledged Mr. Morecombe as their landlord.

Mr. Thornbury was hardly so successful in his inquiries about old Squire Jacob Morecombe, as he knew of no one in Devonshire to whom he could write on the subject. After Mr. Morecombe had been with his uncle about a week, Mr. Thornbury wrote to the Squire, as had been suggested, and very soon received a most satisfactory answer. The letter was well worded, but rather badly written. He assured Mr. Thorn-

bury that, though he could not be present at the wedding, owing to his infirmities, the young couple would have his sincere wishes for their future welfare; and the letter wound up with a promise that he would forward to Charity, by his nephew, a trifling present, which he begged she would accept as a pledge of his affection and esteem.

In due time Mr. Morecombe returned, bringing with him the old gentleman's present. Charity could scarcely restrain her delight, when, on opening the little packet, she found it contained a magnificent pair of diamond earrings. All were much pleased with the gift, and it contributed not a little to raise in their minds an exalted idea of the old Squire's wealth. Everything now progressed in the smoothest and most satisfactory manner, and the more the Thornburys saw of Mr. Morecombe, the more they liked him.

Fortunately, his love for his affianced bride, though great, was quite compatible with the exercise of considerable foresight. To do him justice, he was indefatigable in his endeavours to find a suitable house in the imme-

diate neighbourhood. He was, moreover, greatly assisted in the search by Martha and Edgar. At last they found one to let which appeared in every way eligible. It was a handsome cottage, in good repair, ready for immediate occupation, and surrounded by about forty acres of meadow land. True, it was more than two miles from the Red House, but the road being good, the distance was of comparatively little importance. The house having been decided upon, the task of furnishing it was vigorously gone into.

It now wanted but three weeks to the wedding-day, and the whole of the female portion of the Red House establishment was in a state of intense excitement. Frequent indeed were the visits which Charity and Martha made to the town, and numerous were their purchases. Dressmakers were incessantly calling, and many were the secret meetings which were held with closed doors to consider, and discuss, and arrange points of difficulty as to wedding dress and matters of millinery. Mr. Thornbury was in part to blame for this, for he had resolved that his dear daughter should be provided with an outfit worthy of her, and he

placed a most liberal sum at her disposal for that purpose. The preparations progressed in a perfectly satisfactory manner, everything being in readiness two days before the time.

When the wedding-day arrived, the ceremony passed off with great *eclat*, Martha acting as bridesmaid, and Edgar as best man. And Mr. Morecombe led from the altar of the parish church as beautiful and amiable a bride as had ever stood before it.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARITY IN HER OWN HOME.

THE newly-married pair, after spending their honeymoon in Paris, returned to England, and took up their abode at Elm Lodge, their new residence. Charity had had but little experience in the management of an establishment, but she became, after a little practice, a very excellent housekeeper. No small portion of her success, however, was due to the assistance she received from her sister Martha, who was an almost daily visitor.

Although things appeared to go on smoothly enough at the Red House, there existed great cause for anxiety in Mr. Thornbury's mind. As we have said, he had promised to give fifteen hundred pounds as a wedding portion to Charity; and he faithfully kept his word.

He had, however, experienced some difficulty in raising the money, and had had to mortgage one of his remaining farms to nearly half its value, thereby diminishing, to a very considerable extent, his own already straitened income by the payment of heavy interest on the money borrowed. The future career of Edgar was also a source of great embarrassment to him. From want of means he was unable to send him to college, or to start him in any profession ; and the poor young fellow (sorely against his own inclination, for he had no lack of natural energy) remained loafing about at home, without occupation, though fortunately keeping out of mischief. He frequently implored his father to find him some employment, no matter of what description, as he had a strong aversion to idleness ; and Mr. Thornbury always promised that he would take the subject into his serious consideration. The difficult question, however, always arose as to the manner in which the necessary funds were to be obtained ; and so many obstacles appeared that the subject was invariably dismissed without any definite arrangement having been made. A time

of agricultural distress also came on ; more than one of the tenants were in arrears of rent, and it was exceedingly difficult to obtain even the money required for keeping up the establishment at the Red House on the most economical footing.

At the Lodge everything progressed favourably, and a happier couple than Mr. and Mrs. Morecombe it would have been difficult to find. True, Charity's husband was frequently away on business matters, but of what description his wife did not clearly understand. As, however, he rarely remained from home more than two or three days at a time, his absence did not cause her any uneasiness.

Before the end of a year Mrs. Morecombe became the mother of a fine boy. The infant was christened Walter, after its father. Mr. Thornbury was one of the godfathers, and Martha was godmother. She, at least, resolved that the office should not be merely an honorary title. Charity, after her confinement, rapidly recovered, and an admirable young mother she made. The arrival of the little stranger was a source of great joy to the whole family. The grand-

father and grandmother seemed pleased with their new titles ; and as for Martha, had the baby been her own, she could not have lavished more fondness upon it ; whilst her love for her sister seemed to have become the greater, even as if a still nearer relationship now existed between them.

Things, however, were not fated to go on without trouble at Elm Lodge, any more than at the Red House. The year following the birth of the infant, a circumstance occurred which caused great disappointment and grief to the whole family. Old Squire Morecombe died, but without leaving one shilling to his nephew. The rage of Mr. Morecombe knew no bounds, and he heaped upon the old man every possible term of execration. Great as was Mr. Thornbury's sorrow, he felt a good deal of commiseration for his son-in-law, and used every argument in his power to console him. His children hardly took the same view of the subject as he did. Martha did not say much about it, except when endeavouring to console her sister, but it was evident that something had occurred to cause her great dissatisfaction ; whilst her brother

Edgar expressed no sympathy whatever for Mr. Morecombe's loss. Edgar was now nearly of age, and was, moreover, a shrewd young fellow. He thought he could detect that a good deal of the anger and disappointment of his brother-in-law was not genuine. He did not mention his suspicions to his father, but told Martha, in confidence, that he should certainly make inquiries on the subject. This he did, with considerable tact, and at last arrived at the truth. He discovered that the defunct squire had been merely a small farmer, and always in debt, and that the most eccentric feature in his character was that he was constantly drunk, without any apparently injurious effect to his constitution arising from it. So far from his being a man of property, his assets were not sufficient to pay his creditors a shilling in the pound.

A terrible scene took place between Edgar and his brother-in-law, on the receipt of this intelligence. Edgar insisted that Mr. Morecombe had imposed upon the family, whilst the latter indignantly denied the charge. In consequence of this quarrel there was a total estrangement between them, and no argument or entreaty

could induce Edgar to withdraw his charge or change his position.

Although Mr. Thornbury was far from being convinced of the perfect good faith of his son-in-law, he argued with himself that no good could arise from cherishing angry feelings; and so, shutting his eyes to all disagreeable suspicions, he and Mr. Morecombe continued to live on terms of amity.

Two years after the birth of her child, Mrs. Morecombe became the mother of another boy, and Martha's services were once more in requisition. Mrs. Thornbury was suffering so severely at the time from an attack of asthma, that she could not leave the house. But she was hardly missed, as Martha combined with all the sympathy of an affectionate sister the attributes of a watchful and skilful nurse.

The christening of the child took place when it was about three weeks old. Charity at first wished to postpone the ceremony, as Mr. Morecombe was absent at that time, and not expected to return for some weeks. She afterwards thought, however, that this might be a good opportunity for taking a step towards a reconcilia-

tion between her brother and husband, by asking Edgar to stand godfather to the child, who was to be named after him. But she found her brother resolute in his determination not to be on friendly terms with her husband; though, out of love to his sister, he consented to stand with Mr. Thornbury as godfather to his little nephew, on condition that he should not be expected to return with the party to Elm Lodge, which he had resolved never again to enter. Her brother's resolution was a source of great sorrow to Charity; still, she could not help it, and was obliged to console herself with the hope that the fact of Edgar standing as sponsor for her baby might possibly, at some future time, help towards his reconciliation with her husband.

The mother and child having been reported by the doctor as doing well, Martha prepared to take her departure. As she was on the point of leaving the house, a respectably dressed though common-looking man entered and inquired for Mr. Morecombe. Being informed that he was from home, the stranger requested to see Mrs. Morecombe. He was told she was en-

gaged at the moment; but to this he replied that he would wait, as his business was of importance, and he must either see her or her husband. He then entered the parlour without the slightest ceremony, and seated himself in an easy-chair, with the air of a man who was resolved to execute to the letter the mission upon which he had come. Martha, greatly surprised at his behaviour, endeavoured to draw from him the object of his visit, informing him that she was Mrs. Morecombe's sister, and that probably she would be able to give him an answer to any inquiry he might make. The man, however, declined to state his business to her. Finding him obstinate, Martha ceased any further attempt, and left the house.

When she reached home, she did not mention to either her father or mother the extraordinary conduct of the man; but she became exceedingly anxious respecting the object of his visit, and began to blame herself for having left Elm Lodge without having satisfied herself on the point. Nor was she altogether without cause for anxiety, irrespective of the visit of the strange man. For more than a year past—in

fact, since the death of old Jacob Morecombe—Martha had noticed that a great change for the worse had taken place in Mr. Morecombe's behaviour towards her sister. He would now absent himself for a fortnight or three weeks at a time, on what he called business matters; and when at home he was often sullen and discontented even in Martha's presence, while the frequently red, swollen eyes of Charity suggested that his behaviour at other times might be even still more unkind. Martha said nothing, but contented herself with trying, by increased attention and affection, to assuage the evident sorrow of her sister.

That night Martha did not sleep, so great was her anxiety about Charity. The behaviour of the man who had so pertinaciously insisted on seeing either Mr or Mrs. Morecombe, had certainly somewhat puzzled her; but her uneasiness went far beyond anything his visit, taken by itself, could have occasioned. Without being able to account for the suspicion, she felt certain that her sister was at the time suffering under some great affliction. Again and again she attempted to drive away the presentiment,

but in vain. At last she could endure the suspense no longer, and resolved to return the next morning to Elm Lodge, and satisfy herself whether any real cause existed for the anxiety she felt about her sister.

At the breakfast-table Martha was silent and reserved. She answered dutifully enough the questions put to her by her father and mother respecting what had taken place at the Lodge during her visit ; but she started no subject of conversation herself. In fact she felt somewhat embarrassed as to how she could break to Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury her desire to return to the Lodge, after so long an absence from home. She could see how glad her father and mother were to have her with them again, and she felt it would almost be an act of cruelty to leave them so soon. Still the wish to visit Charity was dominant, and she could not overcome it.

A circumstance soon occurred which relieved her from the difficulty. Before they had finished breakfast, a little cow-boy, who was employed at the Lodge, brought a letter from Charity. Martha hastily opened it, and read as follows to her father and mother :—

“DEAREST MARTHA,—Pray come and see me immediately, as I wish particularly to consult you about a letter I have just received from Mr. Morecombe.

“Ever your affectionate sister,

“CHARITY.”

Although the letter had nothing alarming in it, Martha clearly saw from the handwriting that her sister had been greatly agitated at the time. She made no remark, however; but folding up the letter, placed it in her pocket, and left the breakfast-table to prepare to go to her sister's.

On arriving at the Lodge, great was her surprise when the door was opened for her by the strange man of the day before. He had evidently not left the house since his arrival, and now appeared perfectly at home in it. He held a pipe in one hand, and, pointing with it to the parlour-door, said,—

“Mrs. Morecombe is upstairs, you had better go in and sit down. I dare say she will not be long.”

Instead of doing as she was requested, Martha

stood as if petrified, and gazed at the man with surprise; of which, however, he took not the slightest notice.

“You had better go in,” he continued, “and rest yourself a little; I dare say you feel tired.”

Martha for a moment longer remained motionless; but hearing her sister's footstep rapidly descending the stairs, she mechanically obeyed the man. Charity followed the moment after, and closed the door.

A glance at her sister's face at once told Martha that some terrible misfortune had befallen her. As soon as they were alone, Charity rushed into the arms of her sister, who clasped her to her breast; but neither for awhile uttered a word. At last Martha said,

“Charity, who is that strange-looking man in the hall?”

“I don't know what you would call him,” she said; “he has been sent here by the landlord to seize our furniture for the rent which is owing.”

“For the rent owing?” inquired Martha, in a tone of great surprise. “You surely do not

mean that the rent of the house has not been paid?"

"No, dear, I am sorry to say it has not; and there is now more than a year due."

"Charity," said Martha, reproachfully, "why have you not told me this before? You knew I would have assisted you if I could."

"Because, my dear, Mr. Morecombe has always been in the hope of receiving money; and, besides, he strictly desired that I should not mention the state of his affairs to anyone. I have often wished to inform you, but I dared not disobey him."

"Sit down, dear," said Martha, to her weeping sister, "and dry your tears; we must now talk over the matter calmly, and see what can be done. How long will this man remain in the house before the furniture is sold? My reason for asking is this: I wish, if possible, to keep the affair from papa's ears; and, if there is time enough, I should like to write up to London, to sell out some of my funds there, and so pay the amount without its being bruited about the neighbourhood."

"My dear Martha," said her sister, "it would

be useless your doing anything of the kind. The man in possession has informed me that, besides the rent owing, he heard that there was a bill of sale on the furniture—and that, if the rent were paid to-morrow, the furniture would be seized for the other debt. Martha, you have not heard all, and I have not the courage to tell you. I have this morning,” she continued, “received this letter from Mr. Morecombe. Read it, and then tell me whether I have not cause to be unhappy.”

Charity here placed the letter in Martha's hand, who was horrified at its contents. It appeared to be the production of an utterly reckless and ruined man. He told his wife that it was perfectly useless to disguise matters longer—he had lost everything, and had not now a shilling in the world. Things, for some time past, had been going rapidly from bad to worse with him, and if she did not obtain some assistance from her father, it would be impossible for him to return home, as judgment had been taken out against him for more than one debt, and the bailiffs were already on his track.

After Martha had read the letter, she remain-

ed for some time silent, while Charity wept bitterly. At last Martha broke the silence with,

“Charity, my dear, this is certainly terrible; but I implore you to tell me the whole truth. How has Mr. Morecombe lost the money he received with you?”

“I can hardly tell you, Martha. Indeed I cannot,” she continued, noticing a strong expression of incredulity on her sister’s face; “but ——” here she hesitated for a moment, “I greatly fear it has been in some way connected with horse-racing.”

“What makes you think so?”

“From his acquaintances being almost all on the turf, as they call it, and the numerous races he has left home to attend. But understand me, he has always been most reserved to me about money matters, and I never inquired into them, fearing that my suspicion of his being addicted to gambling would turn out correct.”

“What can we possibly do?” said Martha, now almost in despair. “I don’t like to tell my father, lest he should become the fellow’s victim; for I clearly see he is too bad a man to spare anyone.”

The sisters were again for some minutes silent—Martha being evidently absorbed in thought.

“Charity,” she said, at last, “objectionable as the plan is, I see but one way by which we can get out of this difficulty; and that is to place the state of Mr. Morecombe’s affairs before my father, and ask him if he can assist us. His health for some time past has been so very infirm, that I fear the shock may have a very bad effect upon him. It cannot, however, be avoided; he must hear it sooner or later; and it is just as well to let him know it now, as when it may probably be too late for him to help us. As soon as I return home I will tell him all.”

The news of Mr. Morecombe’s ruin was a terrible blow to Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury—the more so as it was totally unexpected. As may naturally be supposed, Mr. Thornbury was highly indignant at the conduct of his son-in-law; for Martha had told him all, without the slightest reservation. At first he resolved on offering his house as an asylum to his daughter and her children, determining, at the same time, that he would never speak to Mr. Morecombe again. On second thoughts, however, he relinquished

the idea as impracticable. He wrote a letter to Charity, saying that in the present state of his affairs it was impossible for him to ward off the sale of her furniture, and that she had better immediately leave Elm Lodge in charge of the man in possession, and, with her children, take up her abode at the Red House. He added that if her husband thought fit to accompany her after what had happened, he would also be received, though it was impossible for him (Mr. Thornbury) to give him the same welcome that he had hitherto done.

The letter being concluded, Martha was despatched, with instructions to return home as soon as possible with her sister and the children. Mr. Thornbury also forwarded a sufficient sum of money by Martha to pay the servants their wages, and whatever little debts might be owing in the neighbourhood. A few hours afterwards poor Charity, with her two infants, returned home to her parents, utterly destitute, with the exception of a few clothes she had brought with her. Sad, indeed, was the meeting between Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury and their child; still they did all in their power to con-

sole her, and made her as comfortable as her unhappy circumstances would allow. In the evening Edgar (who had been absent for a few days, on a visit to a young friend in the neighbourhood) returned home, and was naturally much surprised to hear what had taken place. He expressed himself in very strong terms at the conduct of his unworthy brother-in-law. When he heard that his father had given Mr. Morecombe permission to reside at the Red House again, the language he made use of was hardly accordant with the respect due from a son to his father; and a violent altercation took place between them. Mrs. Thornbury and Martha, assisted by Charity, attempted to pour oil on the troubled waters—but without success. The anger of both, when they separated for the night, was unabated; and Edgar declared, in spite of the entreaties of his mother and sisters, that the moment Mr. Morecombe put his foot under that roof, he would leave it, never to return.

CHAPTER X.

MR. MORECOMBE STARTS IN BUSINESS ON
HIS OWN ACCOUNT.

IF Mr. Thornbury had concluded that his son-in-law would abstain from joining Charity at the Red House, he was grievously mistaken. Delicacy was by no means one of that gentleman's weaknesses; and without the slightest hesitation he accepted Mr. Thornbury's very qualified invitation. As soon as he made his appearance, Edgar Thornbury, true to the threat he had made, left home, and took up his abode at the house of the young friend already alluded to. At first Mr. Morecombe's behaviour was of the most penitent and subdued description. He submitted with great resignation to Mr. Thornbury's anger; and, with all the persuasive eloquence he was master of, he attempted to win over Martha to his cause. He saw very little

of Mrs. Thornbury, as her asthma, added to the shock of Charity's return in so destitute a condition, had thrown her on a bed of sickness, to which she was confined for several weeks. As far as Martha was concerned, his attempts to regain her good opinion were a failure. Whenever he spoke to her she replied with great civility, and without the slightest anger, but her answers were always laconic, and she never on any occasion commenced a conversation with him.

But if Martha was, inexorable, not so Mr. Thornbury. Mr. Morecombe possessed to perfection one accomplishment of the swindler—plausibility; and he now used it with great tact and skill. He commenced operations by frequently expressing his regret at the disordered state of his affairs, and the unhappy habit of gambling he had been insensibly drawn into.

"I am not naturally a gambler," he would say; "no man, indeed, can have greater objections to the habit than I have, and nothing shall ever induce me to make another bet—still, when a man commences running down hill, it is very difficult for him to stop himself just at the mo-

ment he wishes. I began playing merely for amusement, and for some years never staked more than I could conveniently pay, if I lost. In consequence, however, of a heavy bad debt I made before my uncle's death, I became in a very slight degree embarrassed, and when I found myself disappointed in receiving money at his decease, I made some heavy bets in the hope of retrieving myself, and lost again. Ill-fortune ever afterwards followed me, and at last I became a ruined man. Believe me, if you only knew half the misery and anxiety I have suffered lately, much and justly as you now blame me, you would pity me still more."

Mr. Thornbury—notwithstanding the discrepancies he could not fail to detect in Mr. Morecombe's description of his expectations on his uncle's death—listened with considerable sympathy; probably looking back to a certain episode in his own life, previous to his marriage. He began now to admit that there might be some excuse for his son-in-law. Mr. Morecombe was too good a tactician not to perceive the favourable impression he had made, and determined to follow it up. He gradually introduced

the subject of his affairs to Mr. Thornbury, and often wished he could have the opportunity of starting in some respectable line of business. He would thereby maintain himself and his wife and family in independence and respectability.

"But in the present disordered state of your affairs," said Mr. Thornbury, one day, when his son-in-law had brought forward the subject, "how is it possible for you to enter into business? I presume you have many debts still unpaid, and with these hanging over your head, all you earned would go to the benefit of your creditors."

"That is unfortunately the case," he replied; "still, if I had a little ready money, I could easily effect a compromise."

"In what way?" asked Mr. Thornbury.

"I have already been in communication with my creditors about it," said Mr. Morecombe. "I owe in all about two thousand pounds, and a compensation of five shillings in the pound would be accepted. If I could pay that sum, and have a little over to start with, I am convinced I should be able to make my way in business."

"In what line would you propose to start?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"As a commission agent. It requires but little capital, and the profits are very great. From the vast number of acquaintances I have, I am persuaded I could easily form a good connection."

"And what amount would you require beyond the money necessary to compromise with your creditors?"

"One thousand pounds would be ample," said Mr. Morecombe. "I should take a small house in the suburbs of London and furnish it cheaply; and with one room as an office in the city, I could do well enough. I should, of course, have to pay good interest on the money advanced, but the profits which would accrue from my business I am certain would easily allow me to do that, also leave me a handsome surplus—more, in fact, than would be necessary for the maintenance of my wife and family."

Although the conversation then dropped, the scheme proposed by Mr. Morecombe made a strong impression on the mind of his father-in-law. He referred to it more than once after-

wards, and on each occasion Mr. Morecombe painted the advantages likely to accrue from a speculation of the kind in still more glowing colours than on the previous one. At last Mr. Thornbury began to think seriously whether it would not be advantageous to assist Mr. Morecombe to carry out his plan; and one day he asked him what amount of interest he would give if he advanced the money.

"I am a poor man myself," said Mr. Thornbury, "and I should have to raise the money. Moreover, I could not afford to diminish the small income I now have. If I assist you, therefore, it must be entirely as a matter of business between us."

"And I would accept the advance on no other terms," said Mr. Morecombe; "the obligations I am already under to you are too many to allow me to accept another—especially one which might in the slightest manner injure you in a pecuniary point of view. I should propose to pay you eight per cent. for the fifteen hundred pounds, and I can assure you that the interest on that amount should be paid as regularly as the bank dividends."

After mature deliberation, the weak-minded man agreed to advance the required sum to his son-in-law. To do this, he was obliged to sell one of his remaining farms (he had but one now, besides that which was mortgaged), for which he received three thousand pounds. After setting aside the money promised to his son-in-law, he invested the remainder in Government securities.

When Edgar heard of this arrangement, his anger knew no bounds. He was at his friend's house when the intelligence reached him, and he immediately hurried home, if possible, to stop the transaction being carried through. He was too late, however; not only was it completed, but Mr. Morecombe had already left the Red House for London to arrange with his creditors, and make preparations for commencing business. On Edgar's arrival at home, he sought his father, and a long and angry discussion took place between them, which lasted for some time. At length Edgar said,—

“It is useless, I perceive, for us to speak longer on the subject. I have made up my mind what

to do. I care but little for the money ; within a few months I shall be of age, and my own master ; but I can see clearly enough that my poor mother and Martha will become in the end the victims of a thorough-paced swindler. I am fully persuaded in a few years they will be totally ruined."

"I will not take that language from you, sir," said Mr. Thornbury ; "either speak and behave to me with the respect which is my due, or leave the house, and do not again attempt to enter it until you know how to conduct yourself."

"I will obey you," said Edgar ; "but let us part, if possible, without anger. Advance me the two hundred pounds I shall have of my own, and I will make my way in the world as best I can. I am thoroughly tired of doing nothing, and being led on by promises of assistance which are never fulfilled."

"And should I do so, in what way would you propose to act?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"I should immediately start for India. I have had the idea in my head for some time, and from what has taken place between us, I am resolved to carry it out. The money I am en-

titled to is quite sufficient to pay for the voyage and provide an outfit. When once there, I know well enough there is room for every man to succeed who has courage, perseverance, and integrity to back him."

"A very nice idea, indeed," said Mr. Thornbury, with a sneer; "without recommendation or introduction, without friends or capital, India is certainly the place for a thoughtless, inexperienced young man to get on in. Nonsense! If you are sufficiently foolish to take a step of the kind, it is my duty, as your father and natural guardian, to prevent you. I shall not advance you a shilling of the money, trusting that before you are fully of age you will come to your senses."

"Let us clearly understand one another," said Edgar. "As my father, you have certainly the power to withhold the money from me for some months longer; but go I will. Either advance me the money, as I asked you, or before to-morrow evening I will enlist in the light cavalry regiment at present quartered in the town. Now, do what you choose; my fate is entirely in your hands."

"You may enlist as soon as you please," said Mr. Thornbury, doggedly.

Without saying another word Edgar snatched up his hat and left the room. Before he had reached the hall-door, however, Mr. Thornbury became alarmed lest his son should really do as he had threatened, and he called him back.

"Let us speak once more on the subject," he said to Edgar, as soon as he had re-entered the room. "If you positively insist on going to India I will advance you the two hundred pounds you require. Better that, at any rate, than have you disgrace your family by enlisting as a private soldier. But am I definitely to understand that you insist on having the two hundred pounds immediately, and that with it you will start for India? Remember I have no acquaintances, and I cannot assist you."

"Once more, father, my mind is fully made up," said Edgar. "Go I will, and nothing shall hinder me. If I cannot go as a gentleman, I will, as I said before, enlist as a private soldier."

"The effect of your folly be upon your own head," said Mr. Thornbury. "I can do no more."

Before leaving the room Mr. Thornbury gave his son an order on his banker for the money; and the next day Edgar started for London. He used great promptitude in getting his modest outfit prepared, and he engaged his passage on board an East-Indiaman, which was to sail in about a fortnight's time for Calcutta. All his arrangements being at last completed, he returned to the Red House for two or three days, to take leave of his family. A painful parting it was for all; so much so that had Edgar not been actuated by what he considered a sense of duty, it is more than probable he would have broken down at the last moment. Shortly before he left the house he was closeted with Martha for some time, discussing in what manner Mr. Morecombe's baneful influence over their father could be neutralized. In her heart Martha had no higher opinion than Edgar of her brother-in-law, and although she was less demonstrative in her dislike, she promised to do everything in her power to prevent her father making any further advances.

"What has already been done," she said, "cannot now be helped. I feel as you do, that

the money advanced will ultimately be all lost. Pray God it may be the last."

"Well, Martha, do the best you can to prevent any more being thrown away on Morecombe. It would be a thousand times better for Charity and her children to come home again, than that my poor father and mother should be thrown destitute on the world. May God bless you, dear Martha! Keep me well informed of everything that takes place. As soon as I have arrived in Calcutta you shall hear from me; and remember, I expect a letter from you by every mail, which I promise punctually to answer. If I succeed, as I trust I shall do, I may yet be able to help you; and should I have the power, be assured I will do so."

Next morning Edgar started for London, and a few days afterwards the ship in which he had taken his passage sailed for India.

During the next year no incident worthy of particular notice occurred to any of the Thornbury family. Martha had received a letter from Edgar, announcing his safe arrival in India after a long and stormy passage. He had had great difficulty in obtaining a situation, in consequence

of his being without letters of introduction. At last, however, he had been successful in getting a subordinate appointment in the house of an agent principally connected with the indigo trade, and at a salary so small that it required great economy on his part to avoid falling into debt. He did not, however, despair; he had now obtained a footing, and he was determined to keep it. At any rate, he could remain a sufficiently long time in his present situation to enable him to obtain a good reference, and then, as soon as he should hear of another and more lucrative appointment, he should apply for it. Altogether, his letter, if not a very satisfactory one, proved that his courage was still high, and that he had good hopes for the future.

Martha's letter in reply gave a definite account of all that had taken place at the Red House since his departure. The facts she particularly dwelt upon were that Mr. Morecombe had arranged satisfactorily with his creditors, and had afterwards started in business with, as far as she could understand, every prospect of success. She regretted to state that Mr. Morecombe had contrived to quarrel with her before Charity had

left the Red House for London, so that she was afraid she should have but little opportunity of seeing her sister. Mr. Morecombe had candidly told her that in his opinion she was, to a great extent, the cause of the discontent Charity had for some time plainly shown, and that as he wished, if possible, to retain the affections of his wife unimpaired, he thought the less she saw of her sister the better. However, her father intended shortly to visit London, and had promised he would then endeavour to make peace between her (Martha) and Mr. Morecombe.

For more than a year the affairs of Mr. Morecombe appeared to prosper; and very encouraging were the reports which from time to time Mr. Thornbury received from him on the subject. The interest on the money advanced was paid with the greatest regularity. Charity also frequently corresponded with her sister, and if her letters did not paint matters in such brilliant colours as those of her husband, there was at least nothing in them to cause any uneasiness. Mr. Thornbury, on his part, seeing the prosperity of his son-in-law, determined, if possible, to endeavour to increase his own income, which was now

limited indeed. The lease of the farm, on which he had raised money by mortgage for Charity's wedding portion, having fallen in, he resolved to turn his attention to agriculture. True, he knew little or nothing of the management of arable land, but in stock farming he had acquired some little experience by turning to account the land which was attached to the Red House freehold estate. It required capital, however, to commence on a larger scale; and Mr. Thornbury for that purpose sold out the 1500*l.* he held in government securities. Things went on smoothly enough at the farm during the summer. The first year's harvest was a most productive one; and Mr. Thornbury began to congratulate himself upon the new speculation he had entered into. Unfortunately, he omitted to insure his stackyard; and one night the whole of the ricks were consumed by fire. It was strongly suspected that the destruction was caused by an incendiary—one of the numerous persons his bailiff had offended, for he was drunken and despotic. Of this, however, there was no clear proof; and the only certainty on the subject which remained for Mr Thorn-

bury was, that the whole year's crops had been lost, creating a large deficiency in his annual income.

Easily elated by any transient success, Mr. Thornbury was as easily depressed by any misfortune ; and without attempting to retrieve his losses by better management, he resolved to throw up his plan of farming altogether. This he did, and found another tenant for the farm.

During the winter, Mr. Thornbury had another attack of the gout, which confined him to the house. Mr. Morecombe paid him a visit, leaving Charity and the children in London. He brought with him the half year's interest for the money he had borrowed of Mr. Thornbury ; and gave his father-in-law such a glowing description of his transactions in trade, that poor Mr. Thornbury began to regret he had not invested more largely with his son-in-law, rather than have embarked in the farming.

"If you continue to succeed in this manner," said Mr. Thornbury one day to Mr. Morecombe, after the latter had been describing the enormous profits he had made in a certain transaction, "you will soon be a man of fortune."

"That, I am afraid, is impossible," said Mr. Morecombe. "I find that a commission agent, to do a large business, requires a large capital. As it is, I am perfectly content, and can maintain my dear wife and children in comfort. I must admit, however, that occasionally I do feel annoyed when I see advantageous bargains slipping through my fingers, solely in consequence of my not having enough capital to entertain them."

"But," said Mr. Thornbury, "I thought a commission agent required little or no capital."

"So I thought," replied Mr. Morecombe, "when I first began business; but I find I was wrong. For example, suppose a man asks me to find a purchaser for some valuable commodity. Possibly at the moment there is no buyer to be found; but the seller is in want of money, for which he is willing to pay a good rate of interest. Now, if I had the money to advance him at the time, always leaving a good margin on the transaction, I should have the management of the sale, and not only receive my commission on this, but the interest as well. Not having sufficient capital, however, I

am obliged to let many such chances pass."

"Now," said Mr. Thornbury, trying to assume an air of mere curiosity, "what amount of capital would you require to enable you to extend your business, and carry it on in a satisfactory manner?"

"Well," said Mr. Morecombe, doubtfully, "I hardly know. I have never given the subject such thorough consideration as would enable me to speak decidedly, for I knew there was little prospect of my being able to raise more money. I should say a few thousands—say two or three thousand pounds—would be ample. Yes, with that amount I am sure I could make from two to three thousand a year profit in my business—taking into consideration the very large and respectable connection I have formed."

The subject then dropped for a time; but it had been sufficiently discussed to prove to Mr. Morecombe that the principal object which had induced him to pay a visit to his father-in-law was likely to be gained. He was, however, too cunning to press the subject with anything like importunity—on the contrary, he appeared rather to avoid discussing it on more than one

occasion when Mr. Thornbury brought it forward.

Shortly after Mr. Morecombe's return to London he wrote a letter to Mr. Thornbury, informing him that he had in view a speculation so brilliant, and one which promised such perfect success, that he did not like to let it pass without making an effort to profit by it. The sum required would be about a thousand pounds more than what he could at that moment command. The security for the advance would be given on warrants for saltpetre, to three times the amount of the money required; and the interest would be large. If Mr. Thornbury liked to join him in the speculation, he should have great pleasure in insuring the profits to him; deducting nothing whatever for his trouble in the transaction.

On the same day, however, that Mr. Thornbury received this letter, Martha also had one from Charity, strongly advising her to set her face against any further advance of money being made by her father to her husband, but without giving any reason for her desire. Although Martha did not quite understand her

sister's motive for writing thus, she implicitly obeyed her injunctions; but as her father did not inform her of the nature of Mr. Morecombe's communication, she could only do so very vaguely and indirectly. Mr. Thornbury made no remark in reply, but contented himself with stating that business of importance would oblige him to leave home on a visit to London for a few days.

Martha immediately despatched a letter to Charity, informing her of her father's contemplated visit to London, and requesting her, in her turn, to be upon her guard, to prevent, if possible, any monetary transactions taking place between him and her husband. Unfortunately this letter fell into Mr. Morecombe's hands; and his rage against Martha was greater than ever. He did not inform his wife of the contents of Martha's letter, so that when Mr. Thornbury arrived in London he had full opportunity of communicating with Mr. Morecombe, unrestricted by interference on the part of Charity.

Mr. Morecombe appeared delighted to see his father-in-law; at the same time he cautiously concealed from him that he was perfectly well

aware of the object of his visit. By degrees, however—and merely as if in the course of casual conversation—he introduced the subject of his affairs; giving details of the most brilliant description as to the amount of money he was making, and his splendid prospects for the future. Mr. Thornbury, of course, expressed satisfaction at the intelligence.

“I am half afraid,” said Mr. Morecombe, one day, after dinner, “you will be strongly inclined to believe that the account I have given of my success in trade must be somewhat exaggerated, but I assure you it is not. Rather than allow any ground to remain for such a suspicion, you would do me a great favour if you would come to the City with me to-morrow, and just cast your eye over my books: I promise you I will conceal nothing from you.”

“I will, if you wish it,” said Mr. Thornbury; “at the same time, do not for one moment imagine that I doubt in any way the truth of your statement.”

“I am very pleased to hear it; but still I shall be more satisfied if you come to the conclusion from your own personal inspection of the books.

To-morrow, then, after breakfast, we will go to the City together, if you have no other engagement?"

Mr. Thornbury, of course, had none; and next morning the two started for the City. Shortly after their arrival at the office Mr. Morecombe spread out before his father-in-law the different account-books, and commenced describing them, pointing out his profits on the different transactions he had been engaged in during the time he had been in business.

The deeper Mr. Thornbury went into his son-in-law's affairs, the better he was pleased with them. He carefully examined the books—for Mr. Morecombe would allow him to pass over nothing in which there appeared any obscurity; and not only did the business appear to be progressing steadily, but everything seemed in a most satisfactory state. At last Mr. Thornbury resolved to enter into partnership with his son-in-law. He broached the subject, and the proposal was readily entertained. A few days after everything was arranged between them. Mr. Thornbury was to have one-half of the profits of the business, on condition that he advanced

another fifteen hundred pounds. The original debt was to be cancelled, and considered as added to the amount of capital employed in the partnership. Mr. Morecombe was to have the sole management of the business; but no transaction of any importance was to be entered into without Mr. Thornbury's being advised on the subject, who could then, if he pleased, put his veto on it, or come up to town and investigate the project thoroughly.

Mr. Thornbury now sold his only remaining farm for three thousand pounds, and placed the amount agreed on in the business, but invested the balance in the bank; resolving that if the partnership turned out as flourishing a speculation as he hoped and believed, he would afterwards add the remaining money to it as well.

CHAPTER XI.

MORECOMBE AND CO.

IT would be difficult indeed to name a mercantile firm which appeared to succeed better than did Morecombe and Co. for some time, for under that style Mr. Thornbury and his son-in-law traded. So perfect and sagacious were Mr. Morecombe's propositions, that not in a single instance had his partner to offer the slightest objection.

At stated periods Mr. Thornbury's share of the profits were forwarded to him, and so large were the amounts he received, that he determined to make his appearance in the hunting-field again. He was even in treaty for the purchase of a magnificent horse, quite up to his weight, which had greatly increased lately, notwithstanding the anxiety he had had, when Martha one morning received a letter from her sister, with an in-

closure. The appearance of the letter caused her no little surprise and agitation, as she was aware that Mr. Morecombe had prohibited Charity from writing to her. Fortunately there was no one in the breakfast-room when the letter arrived, consequently she could read it undisturbed by any questions.

In the letter Charity invited her to come up to London and spend a few days with her, as she wished very much to see her and consult her about many things. She also stated that, Mr. Morecombe being from home, she was very dull, and Martha would only be acting kindly if she did not delay coming, but would start off as quickly as possible. If Martha's surprise was great on reading the letter, it amounted to absolute terror when she glanced at the inclosure. In it Charity told her sister that she had written the other for her father and mother to see, as she wished if possible to conceal from them all cause of anxiety until the last moment, although they must ultimately learn it. Utter ruin, she said, awaited them all, and she very much feared disgrace also. Not only had Mr. Morecombe contracted many debts which he

was unable to pay, but there was too much reason to believe that his reputation was blasted beyond hope of recovery. She would not explain more by letter, as there was a remote chance of its falling into other hands ; and it was better to keep the affair secret as long as possible.

Martha was perfectly thunderstruck at these tidings. Collecting her senses as quickly as possible, and assuming an expression of as little anxiety as she could, she placed the inclosure in her pocket, and gave Charity's letter to her father and mother to read when they entered the breakfast-room. Somewhat to Martha's dissatisfaction, Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury seemed rather pleased at the idea than otherwise. They looked upon the invitation Martha had received as indicative of a more friendly feeling towards her on the part of Mr. Morecombe. Charity was again expecting her confinement, and it would be a great comfort to have her sister with her. They advised Martha not to delay her departure, but to start for London by that night's coach. Martha of course made no objection, but immediately commenced her preparations for the jour-

ney, and before night she left home for X—, and arrived in London the next morning.

As soon as Martha left the coach, she hailed a cab, and drove direct to Mr. Morecombe's house in Islington. On her arrival, she found the shutters closed, as though the family had not yet risen. This gave her but little surprise, as it was still early; but as she could not keep the cabman waiting, she told him to knock at the door. He obeyed her, and remained for some time expecting that it would be opened, but no one coming he knocked again, this time much louder than before. Still the door remained closed, nor was there the appearance of anyone at the windows. Again and again the man knocked, but without any better success; and at length he asked Martha whether she was certain they had driven to the right address, as he thought the house must be deserted. But Martha assured him there could be no mistake, and she began to feel extremely uneasy at finding that no one answered the knocking. A slight noise was at last heard in the passage, and the next minute the bolts were withdrawn by a shabby disreputable looking old man, still half

asleep, and looking as if he had slept in his clothes.

"Does Mr. Morecombe live here?" inquired Martha.

"No," said the old man sulkily, "he don't;" and without further observation he closed the door.

The driver, in obedience to Martha's instruction, again knocked. The old man opened the door, but evidently in a worse humour than before.

"My good man," said Martha, who had now alighted from the cab, "I am sorry to trouble you, but you will greatly oblige me by telling me where I can find Mr. Morecombe, for he certainly did live here."

"Very likely," was the reply, "but he don't now."

"Is Mrs. Morecombe at home, then?"

"No, there is nobody here but me, and I'm in possession."

"In possession! and what for?" inquired Martha, in a tone of great surprise.

"Well, for twelve months' rent, if you must know," said the man.

"Will you allow me to come in, then," said Martha, "and wait till I can make some further inquiries?"

"Not unless you're a policeman with a search warrant; and you don't look much like that;" and with this the old man closed the door.

Poor Martha, utterly bewildered, remained motionless on the pavement, the cabman quietly waiting her orders. Presently a milk-woman advanced, and noticing Martha's indecision said,

"If you're wanting the Morecombes, ma'am, they're gone from here."

"Can you tell me where I can find them?" inquired Martha.

"I cannot, ma'am, exactly," said the woman with some hesitation; "what might you want with them?"

"I am Mrs. Morecombe's sister," said Martha, "and I particularly wish to see her."

"Oh! that's different, ma'am," said the woman. "I thought you might be wanting money of her; a good many people do, and she has been almost harassed to death. She owes me a matter of thirty shillings, but I should be sorry to

worry her for it, poor thing, for she's in great trouble now."

"And can you not tell me where I can find her?" said Martha.

"Well, ma'am, as you're her sister, I can," was the reply. "If you take the second turning to the right, and the first to the left, you will find her at No. 15, Mrs. Thornton's; you can't miss it, it ain't five minutes' walk from here."

Martha thanked the woman for her information, and again entered the cab. The first street into which they turned was mean and poverty-stricken enough, but it was respectable compared with the one in which Charity lodged. The house itself was a miserable looking little greengrocer's shop; in fact, so squalid was it, that had the name of Thornton not been over the door, Martha would have believed she had wholly mistaken the woman's instructions. On inquiring whether Mrs. Morecombe lived there, Martha was answered in the affirmative, and was requested to walk up stairs and she would find Mrs. Morecombe on the first floor. Martha, having dismissed the cabman, made her way, with difficulty, up the narrow staircase, leaving her trunk

in the shop. As Martha reached the door the eldest child sprang into her arms, and Charity turning round to ascertain what had made the child run from her side, recognised Martha. Uttering a pleased though subdued exclamation of surprise, she rushed forward, and in a moment the sisters were in each other's arms. For some minutes emotion kept both silent. As soon as they had recovered a little, Charity said,

"How kind it is of you, dear Martha, to come up! Oh! how earnestly I have wished to see you! We were turned out of our house yesterday, and I was going to write to-day, to tell you where to find us. How did you find us out?"

Martha told her of the meeting with the milk-woman.

"You must have been very much surprised, dear Martha," said Charity, "to find that we had moved; but, thank God, you are here now!"

"But what has occurred to oblige you to quit your house?"

"It is a long story, Martha, and a sad one. An execution for arrears of rent was put in

yesterday, and the landlord insisted on our leaving the house immediately. Fortunately, Mrs. Thornton had pity on us, and has taken us in. If it had not been for her kindness, my poor children and myself would not have had a roof over our heads last night."

"But what right had he to turn you out of the house in that manner?" inquired Martha; "surely that cannot be law."

"We had no one to protect us," said Charity; "and I could do nothing, for he threatened to send for the police, if I did not leave the house."

"But where is Mr. Morecombe," said Martha, "that he has left you at such a moment?"

Charity looked in her sister's face, and her eyes filled with tears, but she remained silent. Martha did not press the question, but contented herself with asking how they had fallen into such poverty. "From the letters he wrote to my father," she said, "we all thought he was rapidly making a fortune."

"Martha," said Charity, "I do not wish to speak against my husband if I can help it, but I am sorry to say that all he has written of his success in business was untrue."

"Why, then, did you not write to inform us of the real state of the case?"

"Because I was not aware of it myself," said Charity. "Mr. Morecombe was always most reserved to me about his affairs. True, we had lately been subject to a great deal of privation, but I thought it was only occasioned by temporary circumstances, or——"

Here she stopped, and gazed imploringly in her sister's face.

Martha was for a moment silent. She looked at the pallid faces of Charity and her children, and easily saw the truth of her sister's statement. Presently she said,

"But what do you intend doing, Charity? You cannot stay in this miserable place, kind though the people may have been to you."

"What can I do?" was the answer. "I have not a shilling, or even a penny, in the world. Besides, they would not allow us to take anything from the house we lived in, so I have nothing to sell to procure food. The poor children have had no breakfast to-day."

Fortunately, Martha, being naturally very economical, had been able to bring with her

several pounds of her savings. She now ceased to ask any more questions, but quickly descended the stairs, and speedily returned again, having purchased some food. In a short time the breakfast was laid, and during the meal the sisters, as if by common consent, abstained from speaking on family matters. When they had finished, Martha addressed her sister :

"Now, dear Charity, I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but you must relate all that has occurred, that I may assist you, and that I may tell my father what it may be necessary for him to know. What has so suddenly ruined Mr. Morecombe?"

"I am afraid," said Charity, sorrowfully, "his ruin has not been sudden."

"Do you mean to say that the accounts he has been sending to my father, up to the last moment, have been false?"

"I am afraid it is too true," said Charity. "As I said before, I knew nothing of his affairs, not even of the letters you say he sent to my father. I only judge from the frequent applications I have had for some time past for money owing by Mr. Morecombe."

"Why did they not apply at his office?" said Martha.

"I cannot tell, though I suspect that has been given up for some time."

"Why then," said Martha, indignantly, "does he not come forward and meet his creditors openly, instead of keeping out of their way, and allowing his wife to be persecuted for his debts?"

Charity was silent.

"Where is he just now?" inquired Martha.

Charity made no reply, but looked sorrowfully at her sister.

"You surely do not mean to say, Charity," said Martha, now getting terribly alarmed, "that he has deserted you?"

"Worse than that, dear Martha—far worse," said Charity, her eyes again filling with tears.

"Charity, explain yourself: this suspense is insupportable."

"Martha," said Charity, "he is now in prison."

"And what for?" said Martha. "Has he committed any act of dishonesty?"

"Worse, Martha," replied Charity, now bursting into tears. "He is accused of having a wife living when he married me."

Martha was so overwhelmed that she was on the point of fainting. Her sister, alarmed at her appearance, brought some water and bathed her temples. By degrees Martha recovered a little, and attempted to ask Charity for further explanation, but it was some time before she succeeded. At last she was informed that Mr. Morecombe had been arrested about a week before on a charge of bigamy, which his first wife's relations were prosecuting against him; and that he had been committed for trial, with little chance of being acquitted.

"I was afraid, Martha, that you might have seen an account of it in the papers at the Red House; and, if so, I am sure it would have broken my poor father's heart."

"He must know of it, dear," said Martha, sorrowfully; "but how we shall break it to him and my poor mother, I know not! But," she continued, "can Mr. Morecombe really make no defence? It is impossible it can be true."

"I do not know, dear, what he intends doing. I have not heard one word directly from him since he was arrested."

"But do you not know the name of the

magistrate before whom he was taken?"

"I do not, dear; but I heard that it was the Westminster Police Court, and that he is now in Tothill-fields Prison."

"How did you ascertain that?"

"From a newspaper which was left at our house."

"And you have not made any further inquiries about him?" said Martha, astonished.

Her sister was silent for a moment, and then admitted that, on finding he was committed for trial, she had written to ask him if she might come and see him; but he had sent back word that he did not wish to see her, or anyone belonging to her.

"What shall we do?" said Martha, utterly bewildered.

"I am sure I do not know, dear Martha; I am completely broken down, and can think of nothing."

Martha rose from her chair, and for some moments walked to and fro in the little room, without saying a word, the two children looking at her the while with wonder. Suddenly she stopped.

"Charity, dear," she said, coming up to her sister, and kissing her affectionately, "this is the time for action, not for despair : we must be up and doing. In the first place, you must leave this house, and I will go at once and take a respectable lodging for you. After that, we will consult what steps we had better take."

Martha now left her sister, and although a stranger in the place, she soon succeeded in finding rooms in a respectable house, to which Charity and her children removed, after settling with kind-hearted Mrs. Thornton. As soon as they were established in the new lodging Martha began to devise some plan of action, for her sister seemed to be unable to arrange her thoughts on any subject. The first thing to be discovered was whether Mr. Morecombe was really guilty of the charge, and to learn the true state of his affairs. The very fact of an execution for rent having been put into the house, and Charity and her children turned into the streets, besides the frequent applications made by Mr. Morecombe's creditors for money, seemed to prove that matters were in a most deplorable state. Still Martha hoped on against hope that the case

was not, perhaps, so bad as it appeared to be, and she determined to investigate matters as far as she could. But how to carry this out was a very difficult point. Presently she remembered the name of the solicitor who had formerly acted for her father, although she knew there had been no communication between them for some time past. To this gentleman she determined to apply for assistance, if she was unable to obtain the information by other means. She resolved first to call at Mr. Morecombe's office in the City, and find out whether Charity had been rightly informed as to his having given it up.

Martha accordingly left the house, and taking a cab, drove to the office in the city. Having dismissed the driver, she inquired whether Mr. Morecombe had still an office there. She was informed that he had formerly rented a room in the house, which he had used as an office, but that it had been given up for more than a year, and that any letters for him were immediately forwarded to his house in Islington. Martha now went to the house of the solicitor, and fortunately found him at home. She candidly informed him of the object of her visit, and im-

plored him to give her what information he could.

"My dear lady," he said, "I would willingly assist you if I had it in my power, but beyond common report, I am sorry to say I know little about Mr. Morecombe's affairs. He has always avoided me, and from what I have heard of him, since his marriage with your sister, I have had very little desire to make his acquaintance."

"But, in the first place," said Martha, "can you tell me if there is any truth in the dreadful accusation brought against him?"

"All I know is from the newspaper reports, and from these I fear there is very little chance of his escaping a verdict of guilty."

"What shall we do!" exclaimed Martha, in despair. "Have you heard anything of his private affairs?" she continued, addressing the solicitor.

"I am sorry to say I have, and that from the evidence of one of my own clients who has suffered by him. I will not disguise the truth from you," he continued, after a moment's hesitation, "the fellow is a thorough-paced scoundrel. I sincerely trust he has not drawn your father into any transaction with him?"

"I am sorry to say that he has, and to a very considerable amount," said Martha.

There was now a silence of some moments, which was broken by Martha:

"There is but one course I can think of at present," she said "and that is to see Mr. Morecombe himself, and get from him, if possible, the truth, both as to the state of his affairs and his alleged former marriage. Can you tell me if there would be any difficulty in my seeing him?"

"I should think not," was the reply. "Leave me your address, and I will send my clerk to make inquiries. I will forward a letter to you this evening, informing you what steps you ought to take to procure an interview with Mr. Morecombe in prison; and if I can be of any further use to you, pray command me."

Martha, with many expressions of gratitude, now took her leave of the solicitor, and proceeded homewards. The letter informing her what steps to take to see the prisoner was sent to her in the evening, and Martha determined on the morrow that she would obtain an interview with Mr. Morecombe.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. MORECOMBE IN HIS TRUE CHARACTER.

THE demeanor of the two sisters at the breakfast table next morning presented, in more ways than one, a singular contrast. Charity, naturally cheerful and lively, was now completely broken in spirit. She tasted nothing, and beyond paying attention to the immediate wants of the children, seemed incapable of the slightest exertion, either of mind or body. Martha, on the contrary, ordinarily mild and staid, now appeared the very embodiment of determination and energy. If she did not eat with appetite, she at least did so as a duty, that she might thus obtain physical support for the labours she was about to undertake.

Little conversation passed between the sisters during their meal. Sorrow seemed to have thrown a lethargic influence over Charity, and Martha was too busy with her own thoughts to

keep up a conversation. Besides, on what subject could she have conversed unless some very unpleasant one? She could say nothing to Charity respecting the inquiries made the day before, that would not rather tend to increase her sorrow than allay it. As for Martha, such a thought as submission to the adverse circumstances surrounding them, did not for one moment enter her mind. To nothing would she succumb, except the positive certainty that her efforts were useless.

Breakfast over, Martha left the room to prepare for her visit to the prison ; but it was not until she was on the point of leaving the house, that Charity inquired whither she was going.

Martha hesitated for a moment, and then she answered firmly, "I am going to see Mr. Morecombe, dear, and to try if possible to obtain from him a true statement of his case, so that we may know how it really stands. Surely he is not so great a villain as circumstances, at the present moment, paint him."

"Pray God you may be right," said Charity ; "but I am afraid he will be very angry when he sees you."

"I do not fear his anger," said Martha, "nor have I the slightest reason to dread it."

"Martha," said Charity, her eyes filling with tears, "pray return as soon as you have seen him, and let me know all that takes place. It is better to know the worst than to be thus in doubt."

Martha now left the house, and hiring a cab, drove to the prison. It might have been expected that as she neared it she would feel anxious as to the result of her interview with Mr. Morecombe. This, however, was far from being the case. She was one of those beings who are retiring and timid in the extreme when there are no especial circumstances to call out their energies, but who become cool and determined in proportion to the difficulties they have to encounter. When she had dismissed the driver, she made her application at the prison gate without the least perturbation. An officer was sent with her to the cell in which Mr. Morecombe was. He was leisurely looking over some documents he had in his hand. He started up when he saw her.

"What, Martha," he said in a jaunty tone of voice, "is that you? You have come to have your revenge, I suppose. You are rather early, though, I am not yet tried, and there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, as I dare say you have heard before."

"If you imagine, Mr. Morecombe, that I came here with any intention of the kind, you do me an injustice," said Martha. "The object of my visit is to ascertain from you, not only for my sister's sake, but also for the sake of the rest of her family, whether the accusation which has been made against you is well-founded; and also to know in what position my poor father now is relative to the business transactions which have taken place between you. At present he is not aware of what has occurred, and I wish, when I write to him, to explain the exact position he is in."

"As to your first question, Martha," he answered, in an off-hand manner, "I must decline entering into particulars, especially in the presence of my friend here," pointing to the officer, who had remained with them; "for information

on the subject I must refer you to the newspapers, in which, I have no doubt, you will find a full, true, and particular account of all that has taken place in connection with that somewhat unpleasant affair. As to——”

“But you surely don’t mean to say that you do not deny the charge?” said Martha, interrupting him.

“I hardly see of what use it would be if I did ; but do not interrupt me until I have done. With respect to my transactions with your father, I am not certain that my arrest is any very great misfortune to him, seeing that at present we are not in debt, let me say, to more than a thousand pounds or so beyond our assets, which might not have been the case had I remained longer at liberty. You see I am frank with you,” he continued, and burst into a forced laugh on noticing Martha’s terrified expression of countenance. “Better, my girl, to know the worst at first, than find things different from what you expected afterwards.”

“You surely do not mean to say that circumstances are really so bad?” said Martha, now greatly alarmed for her father.

"It is a fact, I assure you," he answered coolly.

Martha remained silent for some moments, and then addressed him in an imploring tone :

"But, Mr. Morecombe, give me some word of consolation—something with some hope in it. You lead me to suppose that the terrible accusation against you is true ; and you follow it up by showing, not only that my poor sister and her children are beggars, but that my old father is also ruined. I can support much, but all this weighs me down," said Martha, bursting into tears.

"I cannot help it, Martha," Mr. Morecombe answered, coolly ; "facts are facts, unpleasant as they may be."

"To think," continued Martha, "of my poor sister turned into the streets with her helpless children two days since, without a friend in the world, and that the ruin and disgrace you have brought upon my poor father will probably bring down his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, is more than I can bear !"

Here she sank upon the seat which had been occupied by Mr. Morecombe, and, lean-

ing her head upon the table, wept bitterly.

"I am sorry for your father, I confess," said Mr. Morecombe; "he is a good fellow, if not particularly bright: but as for your sister, I suspect she is not without her consolation. If she is poor, she has, at any rate, got rid of a husband she detests, although there is not perhaps much love lost between us. If I have been a bad husband—which I know you to believe me to have been—I have not been much more fortunate in a wife."

At the commencement of this remark Martha raised her head from the table, and when it was completed she sat erect, and regarded Mr. Morecombe with a look of defiance, such as those who knew her on ordinary occasions would hardly have thought her capable of showing.

"How dare you speak of my sister in that manner?" she said, in a tone of deep indignation, rising from her seat as she spoke. "What right have you to speak of her so disrespectfully, I say? She has been a good wife to you—a thousand times better than you deserved."

"Come, come, Martha," said Mr. Morecombe, "do not talk to me in that manner, or I will

answer you in the same tone. I can assure you my tongue is as well hung as yours, woman though you be."

"I care not," said Martha; "say what you please. You cannot, with the slightest pretence of truth, say anything against my poor sister. You have behaved most infamously to her."

"Take care, Martha."

"You were received by us with friendship and confidence. My father gave you his darling child, and became poor to make you rich and happy. And what is the return you have made us? The ruin you have brought on us all is nothing in comparison with the disgrace you have covered us with."

"I have at any rate given you an opportunity of showing your care and solicitude for your family, Martha," answered Mr. Morecombe, with a sneer.

"What have my sister and her children to depend on now," continued Martha, without noticing his remark, "save the sympathy of those whom your villany has ruined?"

"Come, come," said Mr. Morecombe, in the same bantering tone, "do me justice at any

rate. Whatever my failings may have been, I have made restitution, and that ought to go a great way in obtaining forgiveness. If, as you say, I unlawfully took your sister from her home, I have returned her to it again without the impediment of a husband to interfere with any future alliance she may wish to make."

This cruel remark had a singular effect upon Martha; it seemed entirely to change her nature. Her eyes glared upon him with the expression of an enraged tigress; she spasmodically clenched her hands, and, advancing a step, hissed at him through her closed teeth,

"You villain! you coward! Oh! how I wish I were a man, that I might kill you!"—and, as if to give greater emphasis to her words, she struck the table before her with such strength that her glove burst, and the blood oozed through the abraded skin of her knuckles.

At this the wretch remarked with a sneer,

"Why, Martha, what a hypocrite you must be! I had no idea you were such a termagant."

What Martha would have done in her rage it is impossible to say, but any further demonstration was put a stop to by the officer advancing

to her, and saying in a kind tone, "Come, come, my good soul, don't take on so: you had better leave him; you will do no good, for he is a thorough blackguard. Do come away."

"I think, sir," said Mr. Morecombe, "you had better mind your own business. I am not shut up here to be the butt of your low-bred impertinence."

"I shall say what I please," said the officer, much irritated. "She called you a coward, and it is true; you may tell anyone you please that I say so. Come, now," he said, addressing Martha with considerable feeling, "let the fellow alone; the gallows is too good for him."

The officer then conducted Martha to the lodge, and having seated her in a chair, procured a glass of water for her.

"Take my advice," he said, "and do not trouble yourself any more about that fellow. He is a thoroughpaced bad one, and you will get no good out of him, you may take my word for it."

After remaining for a few minutes longer, Martha thanked the warder for his kindness, and leaving the prison, walked rapidly away; nor

did she slacken her pace till she had reached home, in a very singular frame of mind.

As soon as Martha had entered the room at her lodging, a change came over her. She had controlled her feelings on her way home, but when she arrived there they completely overcame her. She attempted to address Charity, but could not utter a word. She raised her hands and moved them as if to give force to the words she wished to utter; and her lips moved as if speaking, but not a syllable escaped from them. At last her features relaxed, and throwing herself on her sister's neck, she gave vent to her grief in a passionate flood of tears.

Charity now led her to a seat, and taking Martha's head in her hands, pressed it to her heart. In this position the sisters remained for some moments. Martha's tears relieved her, and she spoke.

"There is no longer any hope, Charity: that bad man is guilty, and he has ruined my father."

"I felt sure of it, Martha," said Charity; "but now what can we do? You cannot imagine the ill-treatment and privation I and my children

have endured at his hands. While I believed him to be my husband I kept his conduct concealed from all; but now it is over I may speak. Take me back with you, Martha: in pity do. As soon as I am well enough I will endeavour to obtain a situation as governess in some family, so that I may be no expense to my father for the maintenance of my children. Pray take me with you, Martha."

Martha made no reply to her sister's request, but rising from her chair, gave her a kiss,—a thousand times more expressive than any words would have been. They now remained for some minutes silent, Martha meanwhile walking about the room, a habit with her when she was thinking deeply. At last she stopped, and wiping away the half-dried tears from her face, she addressed Charity with such a calm in her tone and manner as singularly contrasted with her late agitation.

"Charity," she said, "we must now determine what course we are to pursue. We cannot leave London for some days. To return home abruptly and unexpectedly would be too great a shock to my poor father and mother; indeed, to my father

it might be fatal. I will write to him by to-night's post, and give him some idea of the trouble we are in. To-morrow I will send him another letter, explaining things more clearly ; and the day after a third, telling him all, and that he may expect us the following day. Get me a sheet of paper, dear ; I will write at once."

Charity immediately did as her sister desired, and Martha sat down at the table to write.

"My dear Martha," said Charity, noticing the wounded condition of her sister's hand, "what is the matter—have you hurt yourself?"

"I have merely bruised myself a little," said Martha, colouring slightly, "but it is of no importance." And then coolly and without the slightest difficulty she commenced her letter. When she had finished it, she read it over to her sister ; and so perfect had been her self-possession that it was found quite correct. She stated that Mr. Morecombe was in great difficulties, and regretted to say there were reports respecting him which bore a most unhappy appearance. She went on to say she had found Charity in a humble lodging, and in great poverty ; but that she had since removed her into a respectable

house, and done all in her power to make her comfortable. She concluded by saying that she would write again next day, and give them more particulars; but at the same time she implored them to expect no good news.

Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, Martha wrote a second letter to her mother and father; and hastily completing it, she left the house, telling Charity that she would return about the middle of the day. After posting her letter, she went to the office of Mr. Willoughby, her father's solicitor. She explained to him all that had taken place the previous day. She told him that without doubt he would shortly hear from her father; and implored him to give the case, which would be put into his hands, the most careful consideration. Mr. Willoughby, with much feeling, assured her that he would look after her father's interest with every solicitude.

"I have for some time past feared you had fallen into the hands of a swindler," he said; "and I would willingly have put you on your guard against him, but, on mature consideration, I came to the conclusion that, as Mr. Thornbury

had withdrawn his confidence from me, it would be unprofessional on my part to meddle with the matter."

After Martha had left the solicitor, she went to the coach-office to ascertain what places were vacant on the day she had fixed for leaving London, and finding there was room for them all, she secured seats, and then returned home to her sister. In the afternoon of the same day, Martha took her two little nephews out for a walk, and seizing the opportunity, she bought them everything they required. Charity thus found her boys with a respectable outfit, when in the morning they had barely sufficient clothes to wear. She thanked her sister for her kindness, in terms as explicit as she could find, but the expression of her face better told her gratitude. Martha did not go out again that day, but employed herself in the evening with writing her next day's letter to her father and mother. This she worded with great care. In the one she had despatched by that night's post, she informed her parents of the heavy extant suspicion that Mr. Morecombe had another wife living; and in the one she was now writing, she

told them that the suspicion had turned out to be well founded, and that there was no possibility of a doubt as to Mr. Morecombe's guilt. His affairs, she also stated with equal certainty, were in the most deplorable condition; and it would require all her father's energy, assisted by the ability and tact of a clever solicitor, to separate his interests from those of his unworthy son-in-law. She concluded by saying that she intended to return home the next day with her sister and the children; and she especially begged that when they arrived Charity might be welcomed in such a way as should not be painful to her feelings. She knew perfectly well that she would receive every kindness, and she suggested that her father and mother should, if possible, receive her in the same manner as they would have done had she joined them merely for the purpose of passing a few weeks with them on an ordinary visit. Having well impressed all these instructions on her parents, she concluded her letter by assuring them of the great happiness she anticipated in being with them again.

Martha did not show this letter to her sister,

but, after having folded and directed it, to be ready for the next day's post, she occupied herself in assisting Charity with some needle-work she was engaged with.

The next morning, after breakfast, Martha proposed that Charity should accompany her to make some purchases. As soon as she had left the house, Martha told her sister that it would be most painful to her father and mother if she returned home so insufficiently provided with clothes, and for that reason she hoped Charity would accept them as a gift from her: and that was why she had requested her to leave the house, that they might obtain them. Charity, who was totally destitute, could only express her gratitude at her sister's liberality; and they now visited shop after shop in search of the various articles they required. Martha, as has already been stated, had an intense admiration of her sister's beauty, and the beneficial change the new dress made in her appearance was most gratifying to the kind-hearted donor. She looked at her sister with great satisfaction, and was infinitely more pleased with the effect produced than Charity was herself. Martha also

bought many necessary things, which were to be made up when they returned home. The remainder of the day was spent in packing and making preparations for the journey, and early the next morning they left London for the Red House.

A few days afterwards Mr. Morecombe's trial came on, when he was found guilty, and, in consequence of several circumstances being brought forward which made his case one of peculiar atrocity, he was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHARITY'S RETURN HOME.

NOTHING worthy of particular notice occurred to Martha or her charge on their homeward journey, and they arrived safely at X—, where they hired a chaise to take them on to the Red House. The children were fatigued and sleepy, while their mother and aunt were absorbed in their own reflections. Charity, as was to be expected, was much depressed; and the idea of having to return home to her parents with her two boys, weighed terribly upon her spirits. Martha's feelings were of a somewhat different description—less painful, perhaps, but hardly less anxious. She greatly feared that, in spite of all her warnings, her parents' sorrow at their unfortunate child's return would show itself in a way which might

be injurious to Charity. This feeling increased the nearer they approached home, and at last it became so painful that Martha felt it a relief when the chaise drew up at the door of the house. Mrs. Thornbury said nothing, but, flinging her arms round Charity's neck, kissed her affectionately. Mr. Thornbury had evidently determined to carry out Martha's advice, and advanced towards his daughter, saying in a tone which he intended to be one of open-hearted pleasure:

“Charity, my dear, welcome home again, welcome home——”

Here he stopped, utterly incapable of proceeding further. He flung himself into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, wept like a child. Mrs. Thornbury, seeing the condition of her husband, quitted her embrace of Charity, and all advanced towards him, for the purpose of consoling him. He still continued to sob, when Deborah, who was standing by, said to him, with much solemnity,

“Be not ungrateful to God, for He hath restored to thee thy good child. Do not sorrow, but thank the Lord for his mercy.”

"Deborah is right," said Martha, "the God who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, has been equally good to Charity. He has given her back to us to cherish, and so let us cheerfully obey His command. He will not desert those who fear and love Him."

These remarks acted powerfully in calming the sorrow of Mr. Thornbury, who now rose from his seat, and tenderly embraced Charity. The children, who had been standing by in mute astonishment, were now brought forward, and kindly treated by all. Calm was soon established, and a degree of happiness now reigned in the family circle, completely shutting out the thought of the late events which had brought them together. After Martha and Deborah had put the children to bed, the family again met, and the remainder of the evening was passed in prayer and supplication to the Almighty, to assist them in the strait they were in.

Next morning Martha was closeted for some time with her father. She related to him clearly and fully all that had taken place during her absence, and the state their affairs were in, as well as she had been able to ascertain them.

"Martha," said Mr. Thornbury, quite aghast at the account, "what am I to do? I am a ruined man. All I have in the world is not sufficient to cover the amount owing; or, at any rate, if I am able to pay it, I shall not have a shilling left: I must even mortgage my life interest in the house, and the little land surrounding it."

"Do not despair, father," said Martha, "there may be still something left; enough for us to live upon, with strict economy. In the first place, we must dismiss our servants, and wait on ourselves. That, after all, will be no great hardship. Remember, those who have courage to appear poor, deprive poverty of half its sting. When Charity's confinement is over, I propose to sell out my five hundred pounds of stock, and with that we will start a school together. I think this is the best thing we can do. I do not see why she and I should not succeed. We have as much ability and energy as others; at any rate, no good can be done by desponding. You had better write by to-night's post to Mr. Willoughby, and place your affairs in his hands."

"I will do as you say, Martha," he replied.

"When God has bestowed on me a child so good as you are, it would be sinful indeed in me to despair."

Mr. Thornbury despatched a letter to his solicitor by that day's post, giving him a detailed account of the business transactions he had entered into with his unworthy partner, and requesting his best attention to the case. Martha, on her side, persuaded her mother to dismiss all the servants, with the exception of Deborah and a young girl. Everything was now put on the most economical footing possible, without anything being settled as to their ultimate method of living, as that would of course greatly depend on the manner in which Mr. Willoughby managed to wind up the partnership affair.

About this time Martha received a second letter from her brother Edgar. He was still a junior clerk in an indigo house, without, at that moment, any promise of a rise in salary. He was then in doubt whether he would not quit the firm with whom he was engaged, and seek for another situation. He could, he said, obtain one at a higher salary without any difficulty,

but the merchant who had made him the offer was in a very small way of business, and there would consequently be slight chance of advancement; whereas, in the firm with which he then was, there were several clerks, and more than one of them were in receipt of good salaries. In case of the death of either of them, or of their getting other employment, he would assuredly have the preference for the vacant post. How he should decide, he could not at that moment say—the probabilities were, in fact, about equally balanced; though he would soon have to make up his mind, as the other clerkship might be filled up, leaving him no alternative but to stay where he was.

Martha answered this letter by the first post. She informed her brother of the terrible calamity which had overwhelmed the family, and the villany of Mr. Morecombe. The future, she said, seemed gloomy indeed; but still she did not despair. If nothing better offered, she and Charity had determined on keeping a school, and, with the blessing of God, she felt sure they would succeed.

The time was now fast approaching for

Charity's accouchement, and the nearer it came, the greater was the anxiety of the family : so debilitated had she become from the severe shock she had received. She seemed, however, to entertain no fears on her own account, but looked forward with pleasure to the time when she should be sufficiently recovered to help her sister in keeping the school.

Charity did not get over her confinement in a satisfactory manner—in fact she was in great danger ; and the infant (a girl) was so delicate, that there did not appear to any but its mother the slightest probability of its living. The time passed, but Charity gained no strength, and the doctor began to be much alarmed about his patient. Martha, with all her intense love for her sister, and her willingness to close her eyes to the real state of the case, could not conceal from herself that Charity was in a very dangerous condition. It was exceedingly beautiful to see the affection and unremitting attention she showed her. She seemed to be no longer susceptible to fatigue, for night and day she was at the bedside. She was in every respect an admirable nurse ; had she even been

trained for the sick-room, it was hardly possible she could have been better. Extremely patient, tender, and watchful, as well as quiet in her movements, she seemed to anticipate each wish of the invalid, while every word she spoke was uttered in a voice so soft and sweet, that it seemed to have a curative power of its own.

Though now visibly sinking, Charity herself had no idea of the danger she was in. She would have her boys beside her, and would converse with them for hours. For their amusement, she would build for them castles in the air, and they would talk of what they would all accomplish as soon as she was well enough to leave her bed. Martha had not the courage to inform her of her great danger, much as she wished to speak of it to her.

A circumstance, however, occurred which, while it relieved Martha's embarrassment as to whether Charity ought to be informed of her danger, and the necessity of preparing for the speedy death that too certainly awaited her, at the same time caused her great sorrow. One evening Martha had, as usual, taken up her

position beside her sister's bed. As night advanced Charity fell into a profound slumber, and Martha resolved to lie down, for a little time, dressed as she was, in the next room, leaving the door of communication open, so that she might hear if her sister awoke and required any assistance. At first she felt little inclination to sleep, and this was still further lessened by the bright beams of the full moon, which shone in through the windows. Gradually she fell into a doze, which might have lasted for a couple of hours. She then suddenly awoke and saw some one standing by her bedside. The figure seemed to be dressed in a robe of white, which became the more distinct from the clear rays of the moon falling on it. So peculiar was the effect produced, that the form appeared almost ethereal, and conveyed to Martha's scarcely awakened perception the idea that it was an angel standing by her side. A momentary feeling of awe came over her, which was broken by the sound of Charity's voice.

"Are you sleeping, dear Martha?" she said.

"Charity," said Martha, having now fully regained her self-possession, "is that you? How

imprudent it is of you to leave your room ! Pray go back again, or you may suffer for it."

"Martha," Charity went on, making no answer to the remark, but seating herself on her sister's bed, "I wish particularly to speak to you. Do not be alarmed, dear, but I have this night received a message from the Almighty, telling me that I am to die ; and that the poor baby will be taken before me. Better so," she continued, her voice faltering with emotion : "we shall soon meet again."

"Charity," said Martha, greatly astonished, "you must have been dreaming."

"It was no dream," she said solemnly.

Martha now sat up on her bed, and passing her arm round her sister's waist, said calmly, "Collect yourself, Charity, dear, and tell me what has occurred."

"I cannot explain it, Martha, but I received the message as I tell it to you."

"But were you not asleep and dreaming?"

"Certainly not ; I was perfectly awake. I had been asleep, but did not dream."

"Tell me how was the message conveyed to you?" inquired Martha, a sensation of awe per-

vading her at the time; "tell me who spoke to you."

"No one," said Charity, "no one uttered a word to me. I awoke from my sleep and looked around to see if you were near me, but I found that you had left the room. Thinking you had gone to lie down, I determined not to disturb you, but partly raised myself up in bed to see if baby was comfortable in her cot. I mention this to show you how perfectly I was awake. Finding baby was asleep, I placed my head back on the pillow to wait till you came into the room. A moment afterwards I experienced (for I can only explain it in that manner) a certainty that baby would die, and that I should shortly follow her."

"But, my dear, that was only your imagination."

"Indeed, Martha, you are in error : it was a message from heaven, I assure you, conveyed to me in a manner clearer than any voice could have conveyed it. Martha, I shall die; and I am perfectly resigned. Nothing can save me, nor would I wish it otherwise,—nay, more, I should have received the message with a wel-

come, had it not been for these helpless ones I must leave behind me. Martha," she continued, taking her sister's hand, "make me a promise that you will take my place as a mother to my poor little boys."

"Charity," said Martha, with something like reproach in her tone, "how can you imagine it necessary to ask a promise of the kind? Had they been my own children, they could not be dearer to me than they are, and always will be."

"Pardon me, dear Martha," said Charity, "pardon me; I do not in my heart for one moment doubt you. Had I thought for one instant, I need not have asked you. Now I shall die happy."

The conversation between the two sisters, which continued for some time longer, was at length broken by the low faint cry of the infant. They went directly to its assistance, and Martha remained with her sister for the rest of the night.

The next day, at Charity's desire, Martha called on the vicar, and requested that he would visit them at the Red House, for the purpose of baptizing the infant, and administering the sa-

crament to her sister. This gentleman demurred for some time—civilly enough, it is true—to accede to her request. He pleaded the great extent of his parish, its onerous duties, the great distance between his house and hers. He inquired particularly into the state of her sister's health, and whether it would not be possible for her to attend at the church, which was about equi-distant from both houses.

Martha informed him that both her sister and the infant were far too ill to be taken from home; that their case, in fact, was such that a day's delay might bring the death of either. Finding the case so urgent, he promised to call next day; and Martha returned home to apprise her parents and her sister of the result of her mission. According to promise, the vicar called at the Red House on the morrow. He baptized the infant, and administered the sacrament to Charity; but all this was done in a manner so cold and formal as to convey as much pain as comfort.

The following day the baby died. Mr. Thornbury, Martha, and Deborah (who now stood on terms of perfect equality with the family), at-

tended the funeral; Mrs. Thornbury remaining at home with the invalid. The service was read by the vicar in so careless a manner as to excite great sorrow in the mind of both Mr. Thornbury and Martha; while Deborah was positively so indignant at his want of feeling, that she expressed herself strongly on the subject. When they returned home, and Mrs. Thornbury had joined Martha and Deborah, the latter said, "I hope that worldly, hard-hearted man will not come here again."

"But, Deborah," said Martha, "you must consider that we cannot do without him. My sister ought to have the services of a minister of religion in her present condition."

"And are we not all ministers of religion?" said the old Quakeress, with some indignation. "Are we women not as capable of praying and addressing the Almighty as cold, hard-hearted men like that? Where do we find in the Holy Scriptures that a woman cannot minister? Are there not in the Bible," she continued, "many proofs to the contrary? Who were Miriam, and Huldah, and Deborah? What was Anna but a prophetess of the Jewish Church?—did

she not publicly proclaim in the Temple the birth of the Messiah? Were not women the first witnesses of our Lord's resurrection, and were they not commissioned by him to proclaim it to His disciples? At His ascension, were they not equally with men partakers of the Holy Spirit? Are they not spoken of as fellow-labourers with the Apostles? Does not Luke speak of the four daughters of Philip the deacon, 'who did prophesy'? Did not Paul say, 'I commend unto you Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea . . . Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus . . . Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.' Romans, first chapter, third, and twelfth verses. And again, Philippians, fourth chapter, and third verse, 'Help those women which laboured with me in the gospel.' Are not these proofs that women are able to do without the ministrations of a cold, time-serving man? Thy father, Martha, may be too sorrowful to minister to thy sister and give her comfort, and thy mother hath not strength enough; do thou then take upon thyself the duty of praying with thy sister, and be as-

sured the God of mercy will hear thy voice."

Although somewhat doubtful of her own powers, Martha determined to follow Deborah's counsel; and the family now met regularly morning and evening in Charity's room, for prayers. During the day-time, in the intervals of her nursing, Martha also read portions of the Bible to her sister, in which she was occasionally assisted by Deborah.

Charity's weakness became daily more perceptible. As she became feebler, Martha seemed almost to forget she was her twin sister, and tended her rather with the solicitude a mother shows to a dying child than to a woman of her own age. One day, when she was standing by her sister's bedside watching her, Charity, who was evidently deeply absorbed in thought at the time, had turned her head to the other side of the bed; and Martha, fearing her sister's thoughts might be occupied on some painful subject, attempted to attract her gaze, by partially leaning over her. But in vain—Charity saw her not. Martha waited for some moments, and then said, in a sorrowful tone, and yet attempting to smile,

“Look at me, my pretty one, look at me.”

Charity, turning her head towards her sister, said,

“I will look at you, Martha, with pleasure ; for a sight of you is the only unmixed happiness that remains for me in this world. I will look at you with love, during the few short hours I have yet to live ; and should it please the Almighty to pardon my sins and take me into His kingdom, my gaze shall still be on you—if it be permitted me—until we meet again there.”

The solemnity with which Charity uttered these words made a profound impression upon her sister, and they never afterwards faded from her memory.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARTHA'S MOTHERHOOD.

IT would be needless to harrow the feelings of the reader with any further description of Charity's illness. She died, and was buried in the same grave with her infant.

The morning after the funeral Martha took her little nephews into the library, and seating herself on a chair, placed the younger on her knee, who nestled close to her, while the elder stood at her side, leaning against her. For some moments Martha was silent, nor did the children disturb her. She had that morning taken upon herself the duties of motherhood, and was imploring the Almighty to bless and strengthen her for the task. Her prayer over, she commenced the formation of a plan for future action. She determined, in the first place, that the chil-

dren should be no expense to her father, as she could educate them herself, until they were old enough to go to school. The interest of her five hundred pounds in the Funds would, with great economy, suffice for some years for their dress and her own; and she would persuade her mother to keep only Deborah, dismissing the other servant, who, being a clever, active girl, would have no difficulty in obtaining another situation. This was necessary, for all that Mr. Thornbury now had was two or three hundred pounds in ready money. To raise sufficient money for the payment of his debts, he had been obliged to mortgage his trifling interest in the Red House to its full value; the fields being let out to a neighbouring farmer, in order to get enough to pay the interest. The only asset of any importance remaining to him besides this was the family plate, which was massive, and of considerable value. Nor had he the power to increase his income by any exertion of his own; indeed, his mind appeared to be failing him, and he had no energy.

As soon as Martha had laid out her plans for the future, she began to converse with her little

nephews. With the garrulity and candour of children, they readily answered all her questions. Martha now drew from them what amount of education they had received. They told her that poor mamma had taught the elder to read, and the younger his letters. The former had also begun to write, and could even work a simple sum in addition. It is needless to say that she found them as well acquainted with the elements of the Christian religion as could be expected from their extreme youth—their infantile prayers being repeated to her with great correctness. As Martha had always been employed in her sister's sick-room, the care of the children, and the hearing of their prayers, night and morning, had been undertaken by Mrs. Thornbury and Deborah, so that their proficiency, coming by surprise, as it did, on Martha, pleased her greatly. She now conversed with them on other matters, with the intention of finding out their natural capabilities and dispositions, and the result gave her great satisfaction, as it proved the children to be both amiable and intelligent. As the morning was fine, she took them round the grounds, and explained the different objects they saw, all of

which were matters of great interest to them—the more that they were totally ignorant of anything connected with country life, never having once been out of London since their mamma went to reside there. At last, fatigued with her walk, Martha returned with them to the house, resolving next day to commence her duties as governess.

Martha's resolution to practise economy in all things was now, of course, a matter of absolute necessity, for she persevered in her determination never to allow the children to occasion the slightest expense to her father. Her liberality to Charity and the children before leaving London, and the expenses of the journey—all of which she had defrayed out of her own pocket—had consumed her savings, and left her almost penniless, until the time her next dividend should become due. She now searched among her old school-books for some elementary works, to avoid purchasing new ones, and she succeeded in finding all that were necessary. She established herself in the library (which she had taken possession of for a school-room), and every morning, from nine o'clock till twelve, she de-

voted exclusively to the education of her nephews. Never had children a more amiable and patient instructress than Martha proved to them.

In this way five years passed quietly over, nothing very special taking place. During that time Mr. Thornbury's mental and bodily health had greatly sunk, so that he was now almost imbecile. Mrs. Thornbury's health was also too infirm to allow of her taking any active part in the tending her husband. As soon as Martha and Deborah had dressed him in the morning, he was brought downstairs and, in the winter, seated in an easy-chair beside the fire, and at the window in summer, where he remained till it was time for him to be taken to bed again. Here Martha proved herself as good a daughter as she had been a sister, and, as her bodily strength was greater than Deborah's, she performed the most fatiguing portions of the duties required by her father.

Martha occasionally heard from Edgar. He had quitted the firm with which he had been at first engaged, and had entered the service of the one which he contemplated doing when he wrote

the last letter. The sole proprietor of the business had become very infirm. In consequence a great portion of the responsibility had fallen upon Edgar, and he was pleased to say their transactions had greatly increased since they had been under his management. His salary had in consequence been raised, though not to any very large extent. His prospects were now much brighter, though as yet he remained a clerk. As a proof of the genuineness of the affection he expressed for his family, he enclosed in one letter a bill of exchange for fifty pounds, as a present to his mother; and in the last letter Martha had received there was not only a hundred pound note for his mother, but a request that when Charity's children were old enough to start in the world, Martha would send them to him, as his footing in India was now sufficiently established to procure them appointments without any difficulty.

The money which Edgar's letter contained came most opportunely, for so low had Mr. Thornbury's finances fallen that on more than one occasion the question had been seriously entertained whether it would not be advisable

to dispose of the family plate. Mrs. Thornbury offered Martha a portion of the money she had received from her son, to assist with the children; but this Martha would not hear of. She had resolved that Charity's children should be hers, and hers alone, and had so attended to them that her conscience might be perfectly clear as to her promise to her sister. Hitherto, by great tact and economy, she had succeeded in making the interest of her five hundred pounds cover all current expenses, though to accomplish this she had occasionally been put to great shifts.

But Martha's hard duties were accompanied with the pleasure arising from success. Better or more tractable children no teacher ever had. She managed them admirably; and it was almost impossible boys could have been under better control. Nor was this the result of any severity on Martha's part; on the contrary, no one could have been more indulgent. She appeared peculiarly adapted for the management of children. While she exacted from them implicit obedience, she was never known to use towards them a harsh expression. She ruled by kind-

ness alone; and in return she received from them not only submission, but love. They were also extremely intelligent, and learnt rapidly.

When the elder boy was between thirteen and fourteen years of age, she was obliged to admit that she could not keep him any longer from school without prejudice to him. She now looked around her for some establishment to which she could send him, with profit to himself, but without drawing too heavily on her very limited resources. It was a matter of no little difficulty with her to come to a conclusion on this point. At last, on the recommendation of a young curate who now performed the principal duties of the parish, she fixed upon a small school about thirty miles distant, kept by the parish clergyman, who, to eke out a very limited income, had taken six pupils into his house. His terms were exceedingly moderate, forty pounds a-year, including all expenses. He was a man of great learning, and admirably adapted, from his genial, patient, and kindly manners, to impart a sound education to the lads under his care.

Martha now felt that her nephew would en-

tail on her far heavier expenses than he had hitherto done. In order to meet this she, without the slightest hesitation, made the first break in her capital, and sold out stock to the amount of a hundred pounds. With this she purchased for him such an outfit as no gentleman's son of moderate means need have been ashamed of, and also made him an ample allowance for pocket-money. When all the arrangements were completed, she herself conducted him to the school, and placed him under the care of the master.

During the next two years' all passed off satisfactorily enough. No improvement, however, was perceptible in the state of Mr. Thornbury's mind, while his bodily health had become much feebler. The reports Martha continued to hear from the schoolmaster of the progress of her nephew were of a most pleasing description. He was intelligent, studious, and obedient, and in every way gave promise of becoming a good and clever man. The younger boy had improved so much under her own tuition that she determined to place him also at the same school. To do this, she had again to break in upon her

capital. The money she had sold out was now totally expended on the elder boy's education, and she was under the necessity of drawing a similar sum for the other. His outfit was purchased on the same liberal scale, and at the conclusion of the Christmas vacation Martha conducted them both to school, with the satisfaction of knowing that she had now completed her duties as their instructress in a conscientious manner, so far as her ability would allow.

Two years after the younger boy had been placed at school, Martha lost her father. The children had been spending the Christmas vacation at home, and Martha had determined on taking them back to school herself, as she wished to visit London afterwards, in order to sell out the remainder of her stock. The last time she saw her father alive was at the moment of her leaving home. He was then seated in an easy chair by the fire, and she attempted to make him understand that she and the boys wished to bid him adieu. He was, however, incapable of comprehending her, so she kissed him herself, while the boys shook his unresisting hand without his understanding the movement. He died the

same evening, and it was only the day before his interment that Martha returned home, without having heard a word in the interim of his death. This change was naturally a great shock to her, but ere long she recovered from it; and when she was capable of reflecting on the subject, she could not disguise from herself the fact that her father's life had for some years past only been a burden to him, incapacitated as he was both in mind and body for the slightest enjoyment. Fortunately, about a month prior to his death, Mrs. Thornbury had received from Edgar a present of a hundred pounds, which relieved them under the expenses attendant on Mr. Thornbury's funeral.

Martha communicated to her brother the news of her father's death. She reminded him in the letter that the Red House was now his, and stated the condition in which it was, as well as the land. Her father, she said, had left some debts which, from respect to his memory, ought to be paid. Even if they succeeded in obtaining another tenant for the land surrounding the house, it would absorb the whole of the rent for some years, and she request-

ed Edgar to answer her letter by return of post, informing her what steps he wished her to take in the matter, as her mother was incapable of attending to business. It was ten months before Martha received any answer from Edgar. He told her in his letter that he would leave the Red House in his mother's hands, and that during her lifetime she should enjoy any advantage she might be able to obtain from it. He also forwarded, as a present, a bill for two hundred pounds. With regard to his own affairs, he informed her that, although his income was still far from being large, his prospects were by no means unpromising. He was still the head clerk in the office, and had the entire management of the business. In speaking of his nephews, he again repeated his offer to assist them; and he advised Martha to send them to him as soon as they were capable of leaving school, and he would engage to take every care of them, and find them employment.

He concluded his letter by saying, that it was very probable Martha might soon hear of his being married; but that matters, as yet, were

not sufficiently advanced for him to enter into particulars on the subject.

On receipt of her brother's letter, Martha resolved on sending her eldest nephew to India. He was now a fine, well-grown, resolute lad, well adapted to make his way in the world. She immediately informed him of her intention, and he received the news with great pleasure. She went with him to London, purchased his outfit, and secured a passage for him on board an East Indiaman. She made him a present of a Bible and watch, both of which she requested him to keep in remembrance of her ; and it may be added that she wept bitterly at parting from him. She remained in town till the ship sailed ; and then returned home with a sorrowful heart, but with the conviction that she had now fully performed the one half of her promise to her sister.

Next year, Martha was able to send out the younger boy, but to accomplish this she expended within a few pounds all she possessed in the world.

The boys being now provided for, Martha remained at the Red House with her mother

and Deborah. Their life was, in every respect, a most unsensational one. Deborah was naturally taciturn, unless when she had an opportunity of speaking upon some religious subject ; and Mrs. Thornbury's health was too infirm to allow of her taking much interest in anything besides her own malady. She was now a confirmed invalid, and the doctor's expenses for attending her made a great hole in their small means. The family plate began to disappear piece by piece, to supply their necessities ; for although Edgar sent his mother, from time to time, presents of money, they were not sufficient to cover their expenses—moderate as they were. He again spoke of his marriage, and this time informed them that the bride-elect was the daughter of the principal of the house in which he was engaged. Her father, he said, would give nothing with her. All the pecuniary advantage he (Edgar) would gain by the match at the time was, simply, that he could live in the same house with his father-in-law, who was exceedingly penurious, though imagined to be very wealthy.

The description Edgar gave of the behaviour

of his nephews was satisfactory in the extreme. He had taken the elder into the house of which he had the management ; and the younger was placed with a friend of his, who had a factory near them. He found them both steady, moral, and industrious youths ; and he had not the slightest doubt of their future success.

Three years after the departure of the boys for India, Martha lost her mother, who had been confined to her bed for some months. She had been querulous and fractious for some time, and insisted that the doctor did not understand her case, and was killing her by inches. One day she insisted upon rising, and was carried downstairs. But if the difficulty of bringing her downstairs had been great, that of taking her back again was still greater. More than once she almost fainted on the way up, and thankful indeed was her daughter when she had succeeded in placing her safely in bed again. For some time she remained perfectly quiet, as if fatigued, and at last fell asleep. So tranquil was her slumber, that after sitting by her mother's bed for some time, Martha sought her own, which was placed in the same room. She

was a light sleeper, and awoke several times in the night; but as her mother's rest seemed perfectly undisturbed, she soon fell asleep again. It was broad daylight before she arose, and she immediately went to the bedside of her mother, who appeared to be still in a quiet sleep. Noticing an unwonted pallor on her mother's face, she felt her hand, and found it was cold as marble. Terribly alarmed, she drew aside the bedclothes, which partially concealed her parent's face, and uttered a loud scream—Mrs. Thornbury was dead.

Deborah, alarmed by Martha's cry, immediately threw on a few clothes, and ran to the sick-room. When she entered it, she looked to Martha for an explanation, but finding her weeping bitterly, she turned to the bed, and saw, in a moment, that Mrs. Thornbury was dead. Deborah's behaviour on this occasion was remarkable, and offered a striking contrast to that of Martha. The latter, on seeing that her mother was no more, gave full vent to her grief, but in her own peculiar quiet way. She uttered not a sigh, nor a sob, but wept on. The old Quakeress, on the contrary, usually so

undemonstrative, now flung herself on the dead body of her mistress and wept aloud, as one who would not be comforted. So great was her grief, that Martha, even in her deep sorrow, tried to console her, but with no effect. With difficulty she removed her from the dead body, but her lamentations continued without abatement. With her dress in great disorder, her dishevelled grey hair hanging unrestrainedly about her face, and her eyes streaming with tears, she unceasingly paced to and fro in the room, alternately wringing her hands, and then clasping them and pressing them to her heart the while, uttering from time to time, and without sequence, such texts from Scripture as at the moment corresponded with her passing thoughts:—

“Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.”

“Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not Thou far from me.”

“Mine eyes fail for Thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?”

“Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like

unto my sorrow, which is done unto me."

"We looked for peace, and no peace came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble."

"Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not with any intermission."

"Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged, and though I forbear, what am I eased?"

"Mine heart panteth, my strength faileth me; as for the light of mine eye, it is also gone from me."

"Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow."

For more than an hour the two women continued their grief unrestrainedly, each in her own peculiar manner. At last Martha's attention was attracted by a loud knocking at the front door. She immediately descended to answer it, and found it was the doctor. In an instant he divined from Martha's appearance what had taken place. He nevertheless entered the house, and accompanied her upstairs. When he came into the room Deborah took not the slightest notice of him, but continued her wailing unremittingly. The doctor, finding that the last sad offices of closing the eyes and binding up the

head of the dead person had not been performed, requested Martha to bring him a handkerchief, and to assist him. As Martha gently lifted up her mother's head from the bed, to allow the doctor to fix on the handkerchief more conveniently, they attracted Deborah's attention, who, advancing towards them, and stretching her hands forward as if addressing the corpse, said,

"Very pleasant hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman. And, O how I loved thee, O how I loved thee! Rivers of water could not wash out my love."

The tone of unspeakable anguish in which Deborah uttered these words communicated itself to Martha, who, utterly overcome, quitted her mother's head, and concealing her face in the pillow, gave way to a sorrow as loud as that of the Quakeress herself. Even the doctor, though a cool man of science, found his eyes fill with tears at the terrible sorrow of the two poor women, as he continued his task alone. The next day, feeling for their desolate condition, he kindly called on them, to ask them if he could

assist them in making any preparations for the funeral. Martha thankfully profited by his offer, telling him she would leave it entirely in his hands. Before leaving the house, he took an opportunity of speaking to Deborah alone, who, now dressed with her accustomed prim neatness, stood ready to open the door for him as he left the house. He told her that, although her sorrow for her deceased mistress did her great credit, still she ought to restrain it. It was her duty to console Miss Thornbury, who required great attention, and not selfishly to indulge in her own grief. Deborah listened to him very demurely, and evidently admitted his reasoning to be valid. She pleaded, however, two words in extenuation of her conduct—"Jesus wept."

The funeral over, the minds of the two poor women became somewhat calmer, and they began to trace out plans for the future. The first thing Martha did was to write a letter to her brother, informing him of his mother's death, and requesting his instructions as to what she was to do with the house, which was now his. She also explained the great poverty

she was in, and asked him to assist her. She said that, with great economy, she and Deborah might contrive to exist till she received his reply, but after that time they would both be entirely destitute. She apologised for troubling him, but she had no other friends in the world to whom she could apply for assistance, and she should not have had the courage to write to him on the subject, had it not been for the love he had always shown her, and his great liberality to his father and mother.

The letter having been despatched, Martha disposed of the remainder of the plate, which realised a considerable sum. With the proceeds she paid the doctor's bill, which was far heavier than she had contemplated. It is more than probable that the worthy doctor would have reduced the amount had he been aware of the real state of their finances, but Martha, actuated by a pride some would call false, had not the courage to tell him. She also paid some other outstanding debts, and then reserved the balance for her own and Deborah's support till she should receive her brother's reply. She and Deborah now fastened up the

whole of the basement-floor of the house, and they then hired a carpenter to insert in the front door the small wicket of which we have spoken in our first chapter, and through this she and Deborah afterwards received their provisions, and answered the few persons who called at the house. They now made an arrangement with Mr. Carter, the keeper of the general shop in the village, to send his errand-boy two or three times a week for orders, and then finally shut themselves up in the house.

Nothing could be more monotonous than the lives these two women now led. They were almost as silent as spectres, scarcely any conversation passing between them. Deborah, always taciturn, as we have said, had become far more so since the death of her mistress: and she now passed her time, when not engaged in household duties, in reading her Bible, or in silent prayer. Things went on in this manner till Edgar's reply to Martha's letter was due—when, to their great disappointment, none came. It was true they had calculated the time for its arrival somewhat too closely, but

then their necessities led them into the error—they were almost starving.

One evening, Deborah had been reading her Bible, as she was invariably accustomed to do before retiring to bed, and when she had finished, instead of rising from her chair, she remained for some time leaning back with her eyes closed and her hands clasped on her lap, her lips moving the while as if in silent prayer. Suddenly she turned her head towards Martha, and said,

“My dear, I can no longer remain quietly here and see thee starve. I have just prayed to God to guide me, and I feel he has heard my prayer. Some of my relations in London may still be living, although I have not heard from them for years. I have as much linen left as if sold will pay my way to London, and I am determined to start off the moment God directs me to leave.” So saying, she rose from her chair, and, without kissing Martha, as was her wont, abruptly left the room.

Next morning, when Martha descended from her bedroom, she found the hall-door open. Greatly surprised as she was at this circum-

stance, she was still more so when, on entering the sitting-room, she found a piece of paper with something written on it, lying on Deborah's open Bible. It was a few lines written by the old Quakeress, stating that at daybreak God had told her to leave; but that she had not the courage to say farewell to her mistress. She begged Martha to be of good cheer, as she should, with the Divine permission, soon hear from her; that her own heart was stout, for, although a very old woman, she felt that the Almighty would direct and support her. Although Martha had not the slightest suspicion of Deborah's intention to depart that morning, she hardly felt surprised at it. To say the truth, a singular apathy had taken possession of her, which increased with her bodily weakness, arising from protracted starvation. Her finances now dwindled down from pounds to shillings, and from shillings rapidly to pence; and, as each coin was changed, she reduced the amount of food she purchased, her weakness increasing the while as well as her apathy. She did not even feel surprised at the absence of all intelligence from her brother or Deborah.

At last, having lived for more than a fortnight on a few penny rolls, she sunk from exhaustion, and would have died, had it not been for the providential discovery of her position by Giles the errand-boy.

It must not be imagined that nothing worthy of note took place in the Red House in the interim between the departure of Deborah and the discovery of Martha by Giles. On the contrary, several incidents occurred well worthy of relating, but they will be better understood if deferred to a later chapter of our narrative.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





